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Fiction (English)

THE TORTOISE

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THE ROMANTIC WOMAN

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THE TORTOISE

A NOVEL

BY

MARY BORDEN-Turner

NEW YORK
ALFRED · A · KNOPF
1921

PUBLIC

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PART ONE

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I

THE man and the woman were dreadfully still in the joyous rustling garden. Through the early rippling light of lovely morning they showed like desolate statues — motionless, soundless, pallid. It was as if the dark night had turned them to stone, and left upon them its darkness. The man was at a distance from the woman. The long emerald lawn still silvery with dew, and the shining space above it, where the birds darted and twittered, separated them, but something invisible, taut as a strong wire held them together.

The man was bigger than most men. He loomed huge and heavy before the rose-laden gable of the small doorway, his great back and hunched shoulders turned to the long low house that seemed too small for him. A weary Colossus, his feet planted on the brick walk between the beds of wallflowers and pansies, he waited, immensely still. His attention was fixed on the distant woman, who sat rigid on the edge of a garden seat, in the centre of the lawn, her long body tilted forward, her bosom lifted, her pale head averted and thrown back so that her face received the full light of the sun. Her pose was that of a figure nailed to the prow of a ship. Her arms hung down, slanting backward. The powerful gesture of her hands, if she had

moved, would have been that of a swimmer, but she made no gesture. Her figure was tense with the dangerous stillness of fear. She looked to him like one who would commit suicide by drowning in the sunlight if she could.

It was clear that this man was capable of great physical effort, but now all his effort and all his power was concentrated in looking at her. In the large white mask of his expressionless face, his eyes were like small lighted openings through which escaped, toward her, all the life that was in him. His looking at her was desperate. He looked because he could not help looking. And while he looked his strength ebbed away from him. Looking weakened him as if a vein had been opened in his wrist, but it was impossible to take his eyes from her. He thought: "Tomorrow she may be gone. It is impossible that I shall never see her again."

He dared go no nearer.

She was small and white in the centre of the lawn. High birch trees towered above her shaping the sky to a canopy over her head. Beyond her gleamed the lily pond framed in its round basin. He saw her as the mysterious and incalculable, and uncertain centre of the beautiful unsafe world. So he had always seen her. Never had he felt safe with her. Keeping her had been his gamble with fate. He had played high, he had played constantly, higher and higher, and he had believed he would win. His faith had been profound, but now he was no longer sure. He saw her in a new and terrible posture.

She had told him, without speech, not to believe any more. Yet he would not give up hope — and how could he stop believing? She had acted. She had taken the issue out of his hands and yet he counted still on one chance. If he left her completely alone there was a chance. He could do nothing but leave her alone. Yet he could not help watching her. He could not help looking.

He felt sure that up to that moment she had not seen him looking. He believed that never had she seen him looking at her as he had actually always looked. And although it might possibly be that even now his face expressed nothing, he felt that it must at last be the ordinary man's face of self-betrayal.

She had once said what a pity it was that he had not a face of his own. Now he was glad of that, but was nevertheless afraid to trust the blankness of the mask God had lent him. He would have lived over again all the many dumb hours of hatred of that vast pale disc that said nothing to her to be sure now that it was quite as usual, a smooth round slit surface that made people stare curiously and told no tales of its owner.

His stillness was not dramatic as was her stillness. It was not a wild arrested movement. His was a far greater stillness than hers. It conveyed no possibility of relief. He was so still that he looked as though never again could any ripple of movement pass over his bulk, neither over his heavy shoulders, his huge torso, his massive legs, nor his feet. One

felt that his present stillness was a thing acquired long ago and was only the culmination and the tremendous result of his old habitual quiet. The effort he now made was only the gathered concentrated expression of the effort he had always made. He had always willed not to alarm her, and he had never enjoyed making her laugh. So he had always willed to be quiet in her presence. It was only when he was quiet that he neither alarmed people nor made them laugh. His effect of alarm or amusement on other people was indifferent to him, but nothing that concerned her was indifferent to him.

Now he knew that there was the greatest danger of alarming her and the pathos of her fear that had always hurt him, hurt him anew in the midst of other new things.

It seemed to him at this moment that with all his stillness, if he moved towards her, he was bound to frighten her to death. Just as it seemed to him that to her, his restrained regard for her must seem like a curse. Yet he could not help his regard for her. Ages ago, he had known that all he could do for her was to restrain it, so that it might not alarm her. The restraint that he put upon himself was so great that it made the sweat stand in beads on his forehead, but it was only a greater degree of the same restraint that he had practised for years.

Everything that had to do with him and with her, seemed to him to have been for ages. Everything that concerned them together seemed to him to be forever. She had willed to destroy it, but it could

not be destroyed, so it seemed to him. He watched fixedly the fixed gesture of her destroying despair. The hurt that it caused him was so great that he found it difficult to breathe, but the pain that had plunged into him the night before and had stayed there had destroyed nothing. He would have set her free to destroy if he could, but he could not. He would have freed her from that terrible posture at any risk, if he could, but he could not. He saw that she would kill herself to save herself if she could. And he would have killed himself to save her if he could, but he saw that she could not and that he could not. There would be no killing and no ending, yet there must be something. He did not know yet what it must be, but he knew that there must be something.

He became aware as he watched her that her beauty interfered with his seeing of her. It had always been so, more or less. Now it was more so. In his great desire to understand her, he was hindered by the fact of her beauty. Her beauty disguised her, and made her mysterious in a less important way than she was actually mysterious. Her beauty used up a part of his mind and his will, and the strength that he would have turned to her service. He found himself now dwelling upon the perfect round of her head that was like a smooth gold coin glinting in the sun. He was disturbed to find that he could not keep even now from looking with absorption at that golden head. His keen exclusive delight in the look of that object confused him. He

could not distinguish at such a distance the line of her profile, her high nose and the curve of her fine pointed lips, but he imagined them for himself and he pondered again upon the strange quality of her face that made her look a foreigner in every country. It was neither Scandinavian nor Slav. There were days when she even looked what she was, an Englishwoman, but her wide smooth lidded eyes with the sweeping eyebrows that dipped down the sides of her forehead and the thin cheeks that came up high under them gave her a strange distinction. Often she looked to him when she moved in an open space like some strange Goddess come to earth to escape boredom. She moved as if she had wings to her feet, and were refraining from soaring out of kindness for heavy people. Now, he perceived so much energy in her stillness that he felt if the thing that held her gave way, she would shoot like a rocket into the distance, disappear above the tree tops and go back perhaps to Olympus where there was the freedom he could not make for her, the immense monotonous freedom of irresponsible perfection.

Her grandeur was not perfection. There was not that finality to her. He had never found any fault in her, nor had he ever been disappointed. On the other hand, never, and that was the strangeness, never had he been content with her. The moments of most complete possession had been the moments of deepest longing, but it was not only because of his own limited capacity for receiving, it was also

that his mind went beyond what she so wonderfully was and beheld breathlessly what she could be. He was doing that now. He was doing it as he had never done it. The pain she had dealt him had sent his imagination tearing through vistas of herself he had never dreamt of.

He admitted with an anguish made up of shame and anger, that another man's interference had brought this about.

One thing was certain, he refused to divide her. But he knew that his refusal to share her with that one or with any other was not a claim to owning. He had never so much as thought of her in terms of owning. It was rather that he could not conceive a modification of their juxtaposition. Either he or she must cease to exist to make room for another. And if he and she persisted, then the other must cease to be.

And one thing bewildered him. He was not sure that she saw it as he did. He was almost sure that she did not. If she did, why had she come back with the impression of the other man so deep upon her? She had not left that other one. She had brought him with her. The face she had turned to him on her arrival was marked with his mark. It had become a luminous sharp face. The stranger's hatred of him had looked at him out of her eyes. He had watched for the compassionate sweetness her eyes usually offered him, but when the stranger's hatred faded it had given place to her own apprehension. Her movements too were not her own.

She had moved swifty, darting here and there in little rushes. Her body had been a tormented thing in his presence.

Yet she had come back to him.

And she had given no explanation.

It was clear that she had not yet decided to leave him. Something had driven her back. Another thing was pulling her away. Maybe she had come back to decide. Maybe she was deciding now.

He understood that she was spell bound by the torment of her indecision.

All that he could do was to leave her alone. If she had come back wanting to know how he would take it, she knew now. Actually she must have known all along. She had wanted perhaps merely to do him the justice of having there before her his enormous dumb refusal.

Silence was their one safety. He put his trust in it. More than their dignity depended on it. Any sound of words would be fatal. He knew that if he approached her and spoke, his voice would terrify her into action. The thing needed understanding. Speech would destroy comprehension. Also, she must face it alone. He had lost her, either for the time being or for eternity, he did not know which. She must go or come back to him. It must be her doing. He was helpless. If she were intending to go, no word of his would keep her. If she went she would go without speaking; he would find her gone.

So with one final draught of her beauty, that he

took from his distance, panting slightly as a man exhausted with pain and with thirst, he turned from her and stumbled his way up the stairs. In his room he took off the clothes he had had on all night, put on some others and ordered his motor.

She from her seat in the garden, heard the sound of his car and turned her head startled, listened to the grinding of its brakes and the powerful whirr of its engines and then as it burred smoothly away, carrying him up to the city, the thing that held her snapped suddenly, and with her hands up to her face she flung herself back in her chair.

II

THOUGH she had not seen him standing under the porch she had felt him somewhere in the background and his presence had exercised on her nerves an intolerable pressure. Her physical fear of him had kept her rigid. She had drawn herself in tight, to combat it, but his going did not give her the kind of relief she had expected. While there, he had filled the place to suffocation but his absence was a positive thing too, a vacuum which refused to be filled. There was no comfort in it. Instead of a definite menace confronting her, there was now closing about her a confined and strained emptiness with her thoughts let loose in it to buzz like a lot of flies under a glass jar.

There was no longer, at least for the moment, any probability of his hurting her, there was only the horror of the certainty of her hurting him. It would have been much easier for her, had he hit her. For a time she had been so convinced that he would kill her, that she had forgotten his pain. What she hated most of all was the idea of making him suffer. She would have preferred his killing her. Now she was left to imagine what depths of complicated suffering had made him refrain from doing so.

It was like him not to do the inevitable thing.

He was a violent giant who had never cracked a teacup in her presence.

Her mind zig-zagged suddenly.

How sea-sick she had been yesterday. It was yesterday that she had come home. She remembered the green chopping waves of the Channel and the nausea that had absorbed all thought and all torment. Sea sickness, wonderful and annihilating, had come to her rescue. What a relief. She had solved every problem by wanting violently to die and end the horrid sensation. If one were often sea-sick one would have no emotions and no conscience. No man's attraction was strong enough to counteract nausea. She would have turned from Jocelyn de St. Christe with a groan.

Very well then.

Her mind wavered. William was always very gentle when one was ill. He knew what to do. She remembered him in a darkened room sitting beside her bed in the night, hour after hour, watching, keeping her alive by the closeness of his watching — willing her to live moment by moment, never letting go. She jerked her mind back from that memory. It hurt her too much.

Her husband had saved her life, so that now she could leave him and break his heart. That was just a phrase. She imagined his actual heart under ribs in his enormous chest, bursting, being torn in two there inside him, shreds of blood and naked flesh. Ugh — ludicrous. People didn't suffer as much as one thought. They couldn't. There was a

limit to any suffering. She was in pain now. There was a vivid, throbbing pain in her side and a dull sick pain all through her. It was because of William. She was imagining what he would feel.

If only she could forget him, she would be happy. She could then give herself up to enjoying her romance. It was more than a romance. It was a deep, elemental, fearful thing. It was like a story of cave-dwellers — of a prehistoric man and woman, a great instinctive passion surging up through the glittering artificial layer of social life.

Jocelyn was beautiful. She herself was beautiful. They were two beautiful animals. That was important Surely that was important. The mating of two beautiful creatures was glorious. She was not vain, she knew what she was made for — she was a primitive woman, and she knew at last what she wanted. She had seen it and recognized it and then had run away from it. Why? Because of William. William her husband was in the way. He was not her mate. The other was that — but — but — William was something — something enormous, something strong and wistful and innocent. Could one hurt a child? She thanked God now that she had no children, but could one strike a child in the face that looked at one with believing eyes — that drew one's hurting compassion out of one? William was a power. His brain was immense. He existed publicly, filling much space. Sometimes he exulted — over mobs of men — silently without showing it, enjoying his power. Then in those moments,

she could turn against him, but with her he was never like that, he was timid — a child. It was unfair.

Always, always she had been sorry for William. It was exhausting being sorry for a man in that way. Or was she deluding herself, did it only seem to her like that now? If she were honest, she would have to admit that she had had other feelings for William than compassion. Fear — she was afraid of him sometimes. Confidence — . It was a habit to count on him — and other feelings.

But she wanted Jocelyn. She wanted his joy, his humor, his fantastic whimsical mind. He was happy. His happiness was contagious. He was full of "joie-de-vivre". One could not imagine him suffering very much. He knew what things were worth; he never asked for the impossible. He understood the limits of pleasure. He knew how to drain the cup of life — he had drunk deep of it. She had not even tasted. She would drink with him, she would drink deep, deep. His voice made her understand. It promised wonderful things. His voice quick and staccato; clever, caressing voice, expressing things she had never dreamed of. It had affected her strangely. The mocking poetry in his voice, passion laughing at its own savageness, sensuality of the intellect, delicate fire. Ah — yes, he was a proficient lover — Where had he learned it all? She was jealous.

Never mind. She had never wanted anyone before. She would never want anyone again — never. She was like that. She had recognized him at once,

the unique man. It had not been the same with him. He had only realized gradually. Men were different. Frenchmen. Jocelyn was French. He was not primitive, on the contrary. He knew everything. His youth seemed a miracle, for he might have lived a hundred years, so his voice said, sometimes. His knowledge had troubled her at first. His eyes had travelled over her terribly wise, divining everything. Horrid, if one was not brave enough to strip one's soul to his gaze. Shameful — or wonderful. He would laugh if she talked like that. She must never use exalted language with him, he would only make fun of her. He had no illusions — no dreams — all the more reason to believe in the tribute of his earnestness. And he was in earnest — she knew he admitted the deep elemental thing drawing them one to the other. Nothing else mattered — nothing in the world mattered but that.

William was romantic — but dumb. Poor William! Certainly his love for her was sublime — but how it bored her now.

Why had she refused Jocelyn what he wanted, what they both wanted? She might have had it.

She was conscious of a swooning sensation. Closing her eyes she invoked his physical presence, the odor of his face, his dark skin, his hair, the touch of his coat and his intangible personal essence so real in her imagination produced in her body a running fiery sweetness as if she were sipping a strong intoxicating liquor.

She had been unable to escape William without

first coming back to face him. It had been necessary to confront him with her secret. Her faith in the miracle had been so great that she had not begun to be afraid till the train drew into Charing Cross station. She had actually until then expected him to shrivel up at the sight of it. On the contrary, he had swelled to even greater proportions.

He had loomed upon her through the dark hurrying crowd, and she had thought: "Either he will kill me or I shall see him lying at my feet hideously undone by what I've to tell him."

He had remained impassive, and she had been forced to admit that his impassivity had partaken of grandeur.

Yet Jocelyn had remained beautiful. She still saw him as she had always seen him, slim, swift, electric, full of light, shining and drawing her to him. Lying there, limp and flabby in the garden chair, she felt him drawing her, just as the sun was drawing up the dew from the grass. She felt like a soft, sticky substance that was oozing away, being soaked up by a distant longing.

She lay in a stupor of emotion.

Suddenly it seemed to her that she was in danger. Her position on that solid wooden seat in the centre of the compact expanse of emerald turf, became perilous. She lifted her head and looked about her, breathing hurriedly, and conscious of her heart thumping. There was the garden, closing round her in all its comfortable luxuriance. The staunch trees spread wide their crisp branches, shutting out dis-

tance, refusing mystery. The hedges were solid walls of deep green. Where brick walls cut them, pleasant vistas of sunny tangles led one's eye just a little kindly way, but the seclusion of the place did not assure or comfort her. All about it, beyond those neat and charming confines she seemed to perceive a surging waste, something as wide and terribly empty as a desert. She had a vision of herself in a garden, as of a solitary figure on an island that was cut loose from its foundation and set a-floating on the vast expanse of desolate and eternal uncertainty.

She shook herself.

The garden was safe, but she hated its safety. Beyond it the dangerous future summoned her.

She gripped the arms of her chair and looking down into the grass, saw little creatures there. Tiny ants were scurrying across a bare patch of ground where the legs of a chair had scraped away the turf. One was dragging a crumb of bread. He was busy. His occupation was of vast importance. His companions too were all busy. The sight of their minute self-sufficiency annoyed her.

She realized now that she had hoped William would do something terrible. If he had, she would be free now and running toward the fulfillment of her joy. It was for this that she had come back. She had wanted him to help her destroy the thing that bound them. Some obscure instinct had impelled her. She wanted perfect happiness and she had known deeply that she would never obtain it unless William annihilated her memory, her respect, and

her admiration, by some ugliness. He had not done what she wanted. His refusal to set her free had been mute and mysterious and complete. He had kept his dignity. His identity remained intact. He appeared to her just as he always had done, only more so. He had not struck her nor insulted her. He had merely walked up and down the garden all night. She had heard his step under her window at regular intervals. The sound of it had made her want to scream, but when it ceased she had listened for it with longing. It took a long time for him to go to the bottom of the garden and come back. Her mind had followed him in the dark, keenly aware of him, of his tenacity, of his weight, of his power. Toward morning she had listened in vain for his step, and had gone out on the balcony hoping to find him beneath her. She would have spoken, or thrown herself down, or summoned him up to do violence to her secret, but he was nowhere to be seen and the mysterious trees emerging above the low streamers of white mist had diminished her sense of herself to a pin point.

She felt dizzy and slightly sick. Her chair seemed to sway under her. Looking apprehensively over her shoulder she got upon unsteady feet. The place was empty and its safety was false and the sunlight pouring down did not warm her. She shivered.

Jocelyn de St Christe was there — waiting. She could see his eyes. They drew her to him. She could feel his hands. Hers throbbed within them. Closer she leant. Closer. She had only to close

her eyelids and fall into the embrace that waited to engulf her.

Something was holding her back.

She did not know what William would do if she left him, and it was important to know this.

She asked herself plainly the question, forming the words distinctly.

"What would William do if I left him?" Then she listened within herself for the answer, her head bent and turned slightly sideways as though actually she expected to hear a reply, from within that region of her body where her heart was beating, but while she waited an obscure feeling of terror, like a spreading voluminous presence, seemed to envelop her and a sense of desolate suffocation fell upon her, as if a gigantic curtain of dust were falling upon her out of the sky.

Instinctively drawing herself together she clasped her arms with her hands across her chest where there was so much hurting. Her expression was bewildered. Could it be that a question asked so distinctly in words could be answered by such a shapeless sensation? That was not what she wanted. She was suffering enough as it was. She wanted some precise knowledge, some literal certainty; any fact that would fix her in regard to the man she was bound to.

She must know what he would do before she did anything herself.

See walked across to the lily pond and looked down

into the water. There she saw her reflection and little gold fishes swimming across it.

"What would he do? What would he do?"

The round stone basin held a pool of infinity captive. Looking down beyond her own image she discerned the sky. She looked down and down into the blue. There was the sandy bottom, and there was the depthless azure, there was too, a white cloud floating and the round leaves of the water lilies cutting discs out of its whiteness.

What would he do, the man to whom she was married?

The crisp leaves of the ivy growing over the stone rim of the basin, made a dark border for the mysterious round of water. The sunlight glanced off from the hard little leaves. They absorbed no light. They were dark and glinting.

It occurred to her that it would be easier to tell what Jocelyn would do, if he were the one in her husband's place. He would take a pistol, a sword or a horsewhip. He would probably choose a sword. He had done it before, that sort of thing, so they said, laughing in Paris. He was not very modern. He liked to do things as his grandfather did them under Napoleon. She could see him bow and then run the other man through and turn away slightly pale.

But it was not William he killed. It was just some imaginary being. No one could kill William or hurt him. No one but herself.

Then what was the use of thinking of things that were not to be. Thinking of her lover, gave her no clue to her husband.

It was growing warm in the garden. The morning had deepened. The flowers glowed. They meant nothing to her. Her eyes skimmed over their colours impatiently. There was the house beyond at the end of the long lawn. Maybe the house would tell her what she wanted to know.

Shaded by towering beeches, it rested cool and serene, its many deep windows open. She imagined that she could see from where she stood, into the pale dim rooms. Those enclosed spaces, so calm and so still, summoned her to them. If she went in and walked through them, they would tell her something. Among all the memories that filled them, surely she would find her answer. But possibly she would find more than she wanted to know, and possibly something different. It was more than likely that the actual question she asked would remain unanswered, but that other questions, endless questions would there annoy her.

They owned her in a measure, those rooms. They would reflect her too much to herself. All her gestures were caught there as if in a hundred mirrors with William towering beside her, filling her background, wherever she turned, a silent significant presence. She saw him now looking over her shoulder into those imagined mirrors of her plaguing memory. His face wore its white mask of comedy, but he bent his head down toward her in a gesture of reverent

attention, and she saw his hands hover toward her, as if he would lay them friendly, reverently on her shoulders. She dared not go into the house.

It would be dangerous to submit to or to invoke its influence. The appeal of a place one had made to fit round oneself was deadly. Because she had been quiet there, and safe, was no reason for wanting to stay.

A maid came out onto the balcony before her bedroom window. Her crisp white cap and apron were blindingly white in the sun. She had a pink garment over her arm. She shaded her eyes with her hand but on seeing her mistress disappeared quickly. She must be unpacking. Should she be told to pack up again? Once more the grey suffocating curtain fluttered round her. She flung out her arms, and dropped them.

"What would her husband do if she left him?"

Would he follow her? — No.— Would he just let her go? — No. — Would he then force her to stay? — No. — What then? Would he go himself first? Had he perhaps actually gone? The house was hers, not his. He had left two hours ago. Maybe, he would not come back? Maybe. — Could that possibly be? Good God, had he done it already?

She found herself running. At the door she bumped into a footman. He had a green parasol in his hands.

"Is it this you wanted, madam?"

"No — yes — thank you."

He opened the parasol and handed it to her.

"Where is your master?"

"He took the Panhard up to town at nine o'clock, ma'am."

"Did he leave any instructions?"

"No, ma'am."

"Did he say what time to expect him?"

"No, ma'am."

"Please get me a glass of water."

She thought while she waited. "If he intended to go he would not necessarily have taken anything with him. He has a set of things in town. If I order the Renaud at once I can be there by one o'clock."

She twirled her parasol nervously. It caught in one of the trailing creepers that hung from the low porch. Pulling at it, she realized that she was stupid and ridiculous. She loosened the parasol with a jerk. What did it mean, this frantic behaviour? Why had she run like that in a panic?

If he had gone, he had gone and there she had her solution. She had intended leaving him and had almost promised in Paris. At least there had been an undersanding, but it occurred to her now that perhaps the word understanding was ill-chosen. She was not sure of what she had given Jocelyn to understand because she was never quite sure of what meaning he attached to words, and she was not really certain that he expected her to come back. There was even something more. As the servant appeared

in the doorway with a glass on a tray, she found herself formulating the phrase: "I don't quite believe in him."

The thought startled her with its ugliness as if a toad had dropped on her shoulder instead of a rose from that tiresome creeper. Her outstretched hand trembled. She spilled some of the water out of the glass that she lifted to her lips. The china blue eyes of the groom were fixed on her in an idiotic stare. His face was brick-red and he moved his lips nervously. The water was cool and good. She drank it all and turned back wearily into the garden. If she didn't trust Jocelyn, what was there left her to do? It was eleven o'clock by the sundial. A blue jay flashed from one tree to another. A pearly haze hung above the river beyond the fields.

She took the path that led to the orchard. Sweetbriar made a frail green tunnel for her to pass through. In the direction of the stables she heard the sound of splashing water. Hens were clucking near by. The grass in the orchard was deep and the crooked apple trees dipped their branches down into it. There was a singing of insects in the air. Everywhere birds twittered. The air was heavy with warm sweetness. She walked through it feeling herself a cold dead thing in the midst of all this murmuring life.

Following the little backwater that bounded the orchard, she went on down across the deep bosomed fields to the river. She was a ghost abroad in the sunshine.

She knew now that William would come back. The thought sent her flying. She could not face William, and as if pursued, by him, yet wanting to hide from the smiling country her panic, she hurried smoothly, in a running walk.

There was so little time. She had meant to decide something. Yet without a decision to present to him, she could not meet him, and how was she to decide?

Whatever she did or said would be horrible.

If only she could get away by herself quite alone for a little, or better still, forever. She must disappear where he could not follow her, that is, where the great image of the harm she had done him could not pursue her. Oblivion was her necessity.

In order to obtain this, she must get rid of Jocelyn too and her want of him. To be free from her horror she must be free from her longing.

"But as long as I live I shall be the victim of both," she said to herself. Why live any longer?

She remembered now the body of a woman that her farm hands had fished out of the river under the bank. It had been washed down by the current and had caught in some bushes. Actually hundreds of people had been drowned in the river. Drowning was a blank unexpressive form of death. One was sucked down into death in a meaningless vague way. The water washed all significance away from drowned faces.

The river was deep at the bottom of the field. Its black current slid by swiftly. She stood with her back against the trunk of a tree and looked down into the water.

III

THE Countess of Sidlington said: "My poor Brandon, I've come to lunch, but you don't look at all yourself." And drooping there before the grey butler, she gave him the smallest of smiles, her little head on its very long throat bent down to him under a phenomenally dipping hat. She was even taller than he, but her height was not imposing. It was just an extreme lengthening out of her childlike delicacy and it gave her in her excessive thinness an exaggerated charm.

Her appearance was not merely a fact, it was an apparition, not because there was anything surprising in her being there, but because she herself was surprising. Serenely, she gathered to her all the light there was in the dim hall. Her outline was a little too strange to be true. Without waist, without hips, with sloping disquieting shoulders, there seemed to be scarce any corporal connection between the small head on the wavy neck and the long feet that were so far distant, scarcely anything to hold them together save a frothy cascade of muslin and an intangible grace. Two white hands, with cool gestures, were there to point out that she was nevertheless, all of a piece.

"Where is your mistress? You are not ill, are

you, Brandon?" The old man blushed under her blue shining gaze.

"Oh no, my Lady, thank you, not at all ill. Mrs. Chudd is in the garden."

His rigid face became suffused with a glow of pleasure, and as she floated away from him into the sunlight murmuring that she would find his mistress herself, his pale eyes followed her.

"Thank God, her Ladyship's come!" he said to himself." Things aren't as they should be in this house, and that's the truth."

The merest glimpse of a small chin under a drooping hat, the lightest note of sympathy in a cool voice and the thing was done. Brandon was a happier man. A spell had been cast upon him.

"A very naughty lady" Mayfair said of her indulgently.— "A magic lady weaving spells," some one had called her, but the mass of her friends did not ask themselves why they loved her, or worry about forgiving her. She was just Peggy Sidlington and they found no fault with her.

She did not look at all like a person admired over half a dozen continents. For the moment she looked just a nice country girl. Going into the sunlight she became at once a part of the garden. It welcomed her. Her freshness was uncorrupted. It sweetly mocked the flowers. She took off her hat, baring her narrow little curly head to the sun. The blue larkspur along the hedge vied with her eyes in blueness.

A gardener sent her down the path to the river.

He had seen Mrs. Chudd go that way an hour before. She gave him her hat to take back to the house and swept away from him across the grass with a long free movement, lifting her head to the sweet sky where lazy little white clouds floated.

She was happy. She was thinking of the nicest man in the world who was coming to fetch her that afternoon. But she was troubled about Helen. Something out of the ordinary she knew had happened in Paris. Helen had written just one strange little note during the month she had been away.

From across the wide field that dipped to the river she spied the white figure crouching on the bank. She waved. There was no responsive movement.

Lady Sidlington had erratic perceptions. She was ignorant of a great many things from choice. Things that bored her were blandly ignored. She had a way of slipping through experiences untouched, but she had a flaire for the dangers and troubles of people she liked. Helen, she knew, was not like herself. Anything that happened to Helen would be something big, because she would take it that way. Brandon's worried old face had impressed her. She now connected its harrassed look with a certain queerness in Helen's distant posture. She sent out a strong note across the field, halloo-ing through the funnel of her hands. She saw Helen lurch forward then sideways, and backward, and then holding her breath she saw with immense relief that the white figure was still there. She knew

that she had expected for one horrid instant to see it disappear.

She exclaimed: "Merciful God!" and ran. She ran well. There was nothing of the languid attenuated doll about her as she ran.

"You needn't have run, Peggy dear," said Helen without so much as lifting her eyes from the stream that swirled under the bank.

"I may if I like, I suppose, darling."

"Certainly, but it's so hot this morning."

Lady Sidlington looked closely at the back of the golden head on the strong broad shoulders. She was convinced that her friend had been about to throw herself into the river. She was conscious of a mute and terrible struggle going on in that strong crouching body with its long bowed back and tense arms. Her own heart was beating painfully. There being however no further need for action and every reason for calmness, she became languid again, and drooped beside the great tree, superlatively quiet.

"Aren't you glad to see me?" she asked sweetly. "The back of your head looks strangely savage."

"Don't be absurd." Helen turned abruptly. They stared at each other. The eyes of the woman on the ground defended her secret from the gaze of the woman standing above her.

"I came to lunch," said Peggy's voice. "I'll go away if you like, though it would be rather unkind of you to pack me off." Her eyes said: "Give it up. You can't get away from me. I'm that curious

thing called your best friend and I'm making the most of all my privileges. I'm interfering with your life at a crucial moment and I mean to do so."

Presently, it looked as if an unseen hand had taken Helen by the scalp and was shaking her. A violent jerking travelled down her body. Dry scraping sounds came through her, choking their way out of her throat into the drowsy air.

"Not you, Oh my dear, not you of all people!" groaned Peggy, swooping down and gathering the sobbing body into her arms. Her legs crossed under her, she held the violent creature, one arm tight round the shoulders, the other round the leaping waist, and against the quaking turmoil of her burden she opposed her own rigid quiet, and to the hurting noises, her pointed, determined silence.

For a long time, she sat there. The golden moments of the humming noon slipped by one by one over her head. Gradually she compressed those sobbings and shakings, little by little, she imposed quiet. The warm field drowsed behind her. A fisherman on the far bank of the river flicked a minute silvery fish out of the water. Helen at last lay still. Her hair clung in a damp mass to her head. Her body was hot with the perspiration of anguish. Peggy Sidlington marvelled at the force that had spent itself in her arms. She spoke mildly, caressingly, coaxingly.

"Poor child. Poor darling. There — you mustn't, you know. He's not worth it."

And then, after a pause:

"Men are brutes," she announced; "but I never thought that William — "

Helen freed herself. "William has done nothing," she said angrily.

Again they stared at each other. From each a thought travelled through the eyes to meet the other, glanced off at contact and darted back into hiding.

Helen said, without speaking: "I refuse to confide in you. If I did, you would have the upper hand. You wouldn't betray me, but I should hate you afterwards." They sat side by side now and their parallel gaze travelled across to the fisherman.

"I got quite dizzy looking into the water," said Helen aloud and laughed, whereupon Peggy said to herself:

"Helen never laughed like that before. She's different. Something has done her harm, she's the worse for it. Her laugh gives her away; it is ugly."

Then they both felt tired and became aware that they were glad to be together. They remembered that they had been together as children. A maze of memories, all blurred into a composite thing with a colour and substance of its own, like a web held them together. Their minds fluttered toward one another and brushed each other, softly. They did not want to hurt each other. However strange they might seem each to the other, they could never be strangers and they were comforted by this realization.

They leaned nearer, and feeling the warmth of the nearness they obscurely exulted in spite of the anguish of one and the pity of the other. "After all," they thought, "we are still young. We are fortunate. People love us. Our power is unlimited. Most important of all, we are inevitable, we are women. Whatever we do, we are bound to do. Nothing can stop us."

And above the harmonious rumble of their subconsciousness, Peggy's sweet voice mumured:

"Paris must have been delicious. Who did you see?"

And Helen's voice answered: "Oh, lots of people, quite amusing."

"Did you do any racing?"

"Yes, some,"

"Who is doing what?"

"Oh, I don't know. Yvonne de Cibourg is getting an annulation. She had just been to Rome. Robert de Beauvallon, the blackeyed one, was badly wounded in a duel with that little white faced Jew, you remember the man I mean. I saw something of the old fashioned people, and was taken into their fine dingy old houses. Dear stiff creatures who look half frozen on the sunniest days. Lunched with the Princess of Narbonne. I believe she had been exhumed by her daughter to preside at the meal. A famous beauty of fifty years ago or perhaps less. A very proud old lady, not over-kind. She didn't like me."

"You mean Jocelyn de St. Christe's mother?"

The name fell like a dart through the web of their sympathy.

"Yes."

"Is he as attractive as ever?"

"I don't know, I had never known him before."

They drew apart. A cord of suspicion shivered between them, was stretched taut and sang warningly in their ears.

"He is really almost too seductive," mused Peggy, aloud. "He adores you," responded Helen hurriedly.

"Oh, no, my dear, he doesn't, and never did, fortunately."

"Why fortunately?"

"Because he would have reduced me to a little pulp and I don't like any one having the upper hand but myself in these matters. He's too good at it — by far."

Helen quaked, her secret leaping to her mouth for exit, strangled her. Stiffening her mouth, she articulated:

"So you found him dangerous?"

Peggy eyed her sideways and announced in a distinct dry voice:

"I am convinced that he is heartless."

Helen felt the word sink into her like a drop of poison that found its way to and mingled with the doubt of her own mind's distilling.

She crouched lower, hugging her sides miserably. From under down-drawn eyebrows she looked at the serene creature beside her.

"I know what you're thinking," said the object of her glare. "Just that I am the most so of anybody, but you are wrong, I never willed to do any one any harm; I hate doing it. The gravest accusation against me is that I am too willing to make people happy."

She turned her pure face sweetly round to be scrutinized and spoke aloud. "You know exactly what I am. Everybody knows. I'm a simple harmless abandoned creature — and — I envy you —"

"Why?"

"Because you have the energy to take it so hard."

"What?"

"Why, falling in love, you goose, and breaking the seventh commandment."

"I've not broken it."

"Then do it quickly, for pity's sake, and feel better, unless of course, you — you."

She paused. A shadow slipped over her face like a veil. "Go on," muttered Helen.

"Unless you've really got the stuff in you to stick to William," burst out the exquisite person rudely.

The coarse phrase startled neither of them. It had its uses. It saved words. Helen took it calmly. She liked it better than the honeyed tones that had evoked between them the man she wanted to possess in her mind quite alone. Anything was better than that they should both think at the same moment of Jocelyn. It terrified her to feel that his image was lodged in both their heads simultaneously. Hers

had been on the point of cracking, to reveal him there, to those great disquieting eyes.

"At bottom I'm furious with you," Peggy was saying. "You and William have always been my miracle, my only one. I used your happiness, to exorcise my own calamities and the thought of your goodness to offset my own failures in that line. You were unique, I depended on you."

"Well, I'm afraid I'm not unique any longer."

"Then let's go to lunch, I'm hungry."

They started back to the house, wearily, dragging behind them over the grass the weight of their unspoken thoughts. Helen felt that she had perhaps left a great failure, there on the bank of the river.

The chair that she had been nailed to early that morning, was waiting for them, in the middle of the lawn. They stopped by it.

"But you can't hurt William, you simply can't do it," burst out Peggy.

Helen stared at the house without answering. A man's figure appeared under the porch. Startled, she held out an uncertain pointing hand. But it was only Brandon, waiting to announce lunch. So they went toward him, arm linked in arm, dark head and golden head glinting in the sun.

People often said that they went about together because they set each other off to such excellent advantage.

"As for me," Peggy was saying lightly, "I believe I shall settle down. I have found the very nicest man in the world."

IV

A GROUP of men shut up in a room in London with the harassing news from Eastern Europe were waiting for William Chudd. He entered the roaring hum of the city at eleven o'clock. June sunshine was tickling the monster. The crowds were happy. A million windows glittered. The bright frocks of the women were like petals floating loose from the flower stalks in the squares. The lazy people in the sleek motors and the brisk pedestrians on the pavement smiled at each other. Balloons bobbed above children's heads in the park. No one noticed the long grey car that made like a needle following a magnet for the grim spot in Whitehall where frightened men sat round a table.

The men in the room knew something that they were hiding from the crowd in the streets. Their knowledge gave them the look of nervous prisoners. They were condemned men, responsible for the exulting mass of free human beings outside. Together, they turned to Chudd as he entered, expecting help from his presence. Collectively they tossed to him with a gesture of irritable appeal the news from Austria that was but the serious confirmation of their fear of the day before. They were greeted by a weary blink of his eyes and a scarcely audible yet gigantic sigh.

Then, while they waited for him to speak and help them, he lowered himself in a chair, put his hands on his knees and seemed to go to sleep staring at their exasperated faces as if they were so many sheep, he was counting in a dream.

They knew they were not sheep, The country had called them its leaders. Portions of the country named them statesmen. On ordinary mornings they were accustomed to consider themselves more than ordinary men, but today, the immense menace of the extraordinary had diminished their sense of themselves and they were uncomfortable at being looked at as sheep by those formidable eyes.

Eastern Europe was large enough to swallow up a hundred thousand two-legged creatures like themselves and show no sign of difference. They were a dozen and they felt the hot glare of such a place in conflagration and cowered before the distant heat. If each one threw on the blaze a bucket of water, the result would be scarcely remarkable. W. B. Chudd was bigger than any of them. He could carry an enormous bucket. They had superstitiously hoped that he would do something gigantic.

He appeared unaware of their misery or their superstitions. At the word "war", he raised his hand to his forehead that was beaded with perspiration, fumbled for his handkerchief, did not find it, gave up the idea of mopping his head and assumed an even greater immobility.

When asked a point-blank question he answered in a monosyllable or cited a few figures in a small voice

that echoed uncannily through the empty spaces of their undocumented subject. The murdered Arch Duke, rising among them in all his ghostliness, would have given them more satisfaction. They became annoyed with Chudd. They knew that he could not be drunk. If this were softening of the brain, then, he ought to have warned them long ago. Brains don't soften overnight. He had been unscrupulous in allowing them to depend on him, if he knew his was giving way.

Some of them, those who knew him best, were made particularly uneasy by his sleepiness. They remembered other days when he had dozed in their midst refusing to speak, his face as expressionless as a plate. The Government calendar bore a red mark on each one of those days. His silence had preceded his thunderbolts. Now they wondered whether they were to understand his great positive stillness as a guarantee of security; or a menace of even greater danger than they imagined. Did he really feel safe or was his brutal indifference his way of meeting the earthquake that was about to engulf them? The telegrams they kept opening, the telephones that squealed in their ears, the harassed secretaries who came and went with bundles of papers, produced on his surface no flicker of interest. The tears of a dusky little ambassador drew no word from his wide closed lips.

Did he know something that none of them knew?

They buttonholed each other in corners of the dismal chamber, before separating for the enticing

relief of lunch and asked one another what was up. One of them at last approached him where he still sat like a lonely Buddha before the littered table.

"Look here, W. B. C. do you know something interesting or are you really sleepy?"

The big man gave the slightest sign of recognizing the other's presence, a faint flutter of the eyelids.

"Leave me alone till tomorrow," he replied.

"You mean you'll have no opinion till tomorrow?"

"Exactly."

And that was all anyone got out of him. He refused to lunch. They were obliged to leave him seated there. No one knew how long he stayed, but he was gone when they came back. Downing Street did not see him. He did not stop there; it was a hundred yards out of his way.

His way led him back now to the place where he had left Helen. He had made a wide loop away from the place in order to leave her alone. For her sake he had travelled all day in empty space, like an aviator looping in a blank sky. He had started slowly, he was ending his circle swiftly. The most difficult part had been when he had poised motionless, and had been annoyed by the semblance of men and the illusion of voices calling at him the word war. From the hard height of his solitude he had heard and seen them, nervous pigmies agitating horrified hands that would have dragged him into their midst, if they could have reached them.

He knew that tomorrow he would find himself down among them, weighted to the earth that was quaking. Tomorrow Austria and Serbia would stare at him out of the map and he would have to consider the relative solidity of the British Isles anchored off the edge of a shaking Europe, but today he remained in the void that Helen had created.

He neared the ground. Approaching the spot from which he had leaped, his senses registered definite jolts of pain. He realized that he would in a few moments find her actually there, or actually gone. His eyes and his nerves would prove her presence or touch the substance of her absence. Positive knowledge was rushing to meet him.

The leaping of the motor car under him, the taut desperate leaping ahead of that thing of steel that he was urging into incredible speed, seemed but a mild straining compared to the bursting strain of his heart valves. He saw the world stream past in ribbons. He was aware of the country as a thing of tattered streamers. He tore through it, scattering it behind him.

Would she be there? Had she gone? Was he already alone forever?

The scratching shriek of his klaxon sounded to him like the voice of his own torment. He felt sure that if he opened his mouth a sound would spring out of it, quite equally hideous.

Her physical being flew beside him, crowding close, a thing with wings that kept pace with the headlong motor. He saw her there in the air, her head out

to the wind, her hair streaming behind her like a golden flame. He marvelled at the vitality of her hair that seemed to send off sparks in the sunlight, and that as he remembered shone in the dimness of her room with a light of its own. Her hair in whose meshes she had once or twice allowed him to bury his face, he felt it now shading his cheeks. Her strong body clove the air with him, the aroma of her flesh was in his nostrils. She was a mermaid of the air, swimming swiftly without moving her cold arms that were laid back along her sides, or her white feet that pointed back to the rushing space they left behind them.

She was outdistancing him. He quickened his speed. Their headlong course became a race, then a pursuit. A long hill rose before him, the white road like a pole perpendicular to his eyes. He mounted it, losing ground. She shot ahead of him. He saw her disappear like a silver flying fish, across the skyline. Reaching the top he found himself alone under white clouds on wide sunstreaked downs. Plunging again into the next familiar valley, children in a pony cart shrieked with fright as he grazed past them.

Their shrill voices punctured his obsession, bringing him down to the reality of a twisting road and cottages. But he was by this time seized with panic. He felt sure that she had gone. His hallucination seemed to him a message.

He recognized the iron gates of the Sidlington's place. Through the bars he imagined Peggy's baby

face mocking him. Five miles further on the gates of his home waited to introduce him to the haunted abandoned place that he knew best on the earth.

He settled down to the prospect of a deserted house. In order to make the reality less horrible, he summoned it to meet him. "Her room," he said to himself. "will be bare of her little things, her toilet set will be gone from the dressing table by the window. The gold slippers with green heels will not be beside the 'chaise-longue'. The miniatures of her father and mother will not be on the table. The bed will remain, with its smooth lace coverlet, and the chairs and the cushions and the white bear skin on the floor. The perfume she uses will still float there in the room, but, she will be gone. If I seal up the doors and windows the place will keep its scent perhaps for a long time, but she will be gone and will never come back."

He asked himself then why he had let her escape. He felt obscurely that he was to blame. He had won her after a struggle. With a blaze of trumpets and to the flash of lightning he had carried her off. He had captured her in a storm of his own making. Now he wondered whether he had committed a crime in so doing. He had a picture of himself running through a tempest with her in his arms, cold as a stone. In those days he had not been afraid. He had grown gradually afraid. Now he knew why.

Their companionship that he had thought a wonderful thing dwindled now in his memory to a mean makeshift. He realized that he had been

waiting all that time for something better. Her kindness had made it possible for him to deceive himself. He had done so.

He had been stupid. He had continued to hope. He had refused to admit that he was incapable of winning her completely. He had been guilty of laying siege to the self she had closed from him.

Because she had been interested in his career he had resisted the longing to concentrate all his attention upon her. Because he had thought that she admired power, he had gained greater power. He had succeeded in translating political ideas into national acts. England as it is today, owed something of its personality to him, but he had done it for her and he had failed to touch her imagination. She had destroyed in him the passion of work for its own sake. What he had dreamt of doing he had done, and this, without joy, because it gave him no added nobility in her eyes. His effort had been for nothing.

Everything had been for nothing.

He might better have followed his inclination. If he had stayed beside her constantly, done nothing but accompany her, watch her, enjoy her, he would have lost her no more completely and he would have had more hours with her to remember. She might have left him sooner, a little sooner perhaps — that was all.

But if he had never let her out of his sight, how could she have gone? No one could have approached her.

He ought to have put her in chains. He ought to have taken her to the wilderness and have lashed her to a rock and have spent his life at her feet motionless.

He had done none of these things because he had cared so much for her happiness. Day after day, year after year he had continued to hope that she would be happy. He had worked for this. His efforts had been futile.

Yet sometimes, he had thought she was happy. He remembered days when her face was alight. He remembered hours when — But he must have been mistaken.

He remembered now what a rare thing it was for her to laugh. He did not remember her ever having laughed when with him alone. The very intensity of his will to make her happy must have blighted her gaiety. He imagined now that she had always been subdued and restrained in his presence. He had weighed on her. He had depressed her. It was possible that he was repulsive to her.

The strength went suddenly out of his hands. The car swerved. He could no longer feel the wheel in his fingers. Flinging himself forward with numb arms hugging the thing, he brought it back into the centre of the road.

Shame — Ah the shame, the humiliation, the self-disgust, the loathing! It seemed to him that he was swallowing dust mixed with grease. His eyes smarted horribly. He could scarcely see the road and the trees on either side. Fool that he was.

Why had he not thought of that before, why had he not known? He was fat, he was white, he was clumsy. He was a buffoon. He was fashioned by God to make a nation stare and a government tremble. He was a mountain of unpleasant flesh. Why had he never seen himself as she must have always seen him? He had never once looked at himself. He had been far too intent upon her, yet, if she had shuddered, if the shadow of his ugliness had passed over her, would he not have seen it there? Was his own desire such a blind and stupid thing that it made him insensible to her distaste. Surely that could not be. He had studied her. He had studied her breathing, the lifting of her eyelids, the dilation of her nostrils, the changing curves of her lips, the infinite variety of her sensitive hands. How could he not have noticed he who knew what all these things meant? When he kissed her hands, could he have been unaware, had a shudder gone through her? No, no! He must have known — unless — Ah, yes — unless she had matched his exquisite scrutiny with as exquisite a deceit.

He cowered in his seat, wanting to hide ashamed as if he had discovered himself driving naked through the country. Shame was new to him. He could not cope with the sickening feeling. His face streamed with sweat. He felt it sticky and tight. Waves of nausea rose to his mouth.

The children of his own village waved to him. They did not know. They did not see that he was a changed and humiliated man. He crossed the

bridge beyond the post office. A white swan floated on the slow stream where golden clouds were mirrored. His gate was open. In another moment he was past the lodge, with the sun in his eyes. Then the house came serenely into view its long facade in shadow and a golden sky glowing behind its rosy gables. His dogs rushed to meet him. Neither the fox, nor the skye, nor the hound had his tail between his legs. They knew no shame. They would never realize.

The distance between the step of the motor and the front door was very great. It was a difficult distance. He was not sure that he could cross it. It was the last lap of the region of uncertainty that seemed to him after all, a blessed region. The door of the house threatened him. It was about to open and let out the truth and like a deadly oracle it would condemn him. He quailed, he half turned to go back, the door opened.

" Mrs. Chudd is in the garden, sir," said Brandon at the door.

V

THE sound that crashed out of him had frightened Brandon. It was nothing more than the sound of his relief, but it had convinced the butler that his master was drunk. The incident had been to Chudd just another proof of the fact that whenever he made a sound or gesture without holding down on it beforehand, he frightened some one.

It was more important than ever not to frighten Helen now, so he tiptoed up to his room to prepare to meet her. He washed timidly, afraid of smashing glass bottles in his nervous hands. He must be calm when he went to her.

As the horrid sweat disappeared from his face, he whispered.

"She's not gone — she's not gone."

He told himself that everything he had thought on his way from town had been idiotic.

If she had hated him, she would not have stayed. Her being there was a proof of his own foolishness.

He imagined her, as he had left her. She was waiting for him to release her from her suspense. He would do it, oh so gently. He would bow down to her from a distance, in silence. She should not be frightened.

Brushing his hair, he muttered that it was a lucky thing for the country. Tomorrow he would throw himself into the national difficulty. He would tell them to prepare for war and make them act. Helen would never know how near she had been to helping on the ruin of her people.

It now remained to separate truth from nightmare.

She was there waiting in the garden, but she was not the same. He must wait to appreciate the difference. Somehow they must work it out between them. He still hoped for her happiness.

The afternoon sun gave the garden an unreal splendour. The leaves on the trees showed translucent against the golden rays, like slivers of precious metal. The flowers glinted, and the people in the distance were ethereal beings whose garments were clouds of rainbow light.

He had believed she would be gone, he had even thought he might find her dead. It had not occurred to him that he would come on her giving tea to a lot of people by the lily pond.

He stood, fascinated, slowly taking in the meaning of the charming abhorrent group.

The magic light showed them to him, as if the group were embedded in a crystal globe and he were outside looking into it. If he took a hammer he could smash it to shivers. He had a vision of the actual possible destruction of them all and of the place they decorated. Their safety seemed to him the thinnest covering of glass. He remembered the

word war that he had heard so often that morning. But all of this only annoyed the surface of his mind.

War, spreading like a prairie fire over Europe and the flames of it leaping across to lick at the greenness of England, this he could and had envisaged without difficulty. He hadn't strangled over it, he had fastened on to it. It was there now in his brain a conviction to be acted upon later, but it must wait. It was not half so incredible as this other thing that loomed before him, and God forgive him, not half so terrible. If his reason were rocking, it was because the little innermost spring of his being had been set whirling backwards. A white finger had poked its way in and had set it buzzing backward, and the immediate result in sensation was a giddiness that distorted his eyesight. He felt that he must have become suddenly crosseyed, for the garden danced and zigzagged before him and he had a feeling of wanting to look at it sideways to keep it in focus. It would be horrid to see Helen jiggling about before him. What postures might she not make.

Yet it was necessary to look, it was necessary to scrutinize.

There she was surrounded by figures in draperies, cloudy petticoats, filmy sleeves, shiny parasols, dipping hats, white flannelled legs, tweed jackets. There she was, she was not dead, she had not gone, no, she was pouring tea. Her long arm in its white sleeve was lifting a silver tea kettle. Her round golden head was bent slightly. He believed that

even at this distance he could detect a smile curving her lips. She was unaware of his presence and at ease among her submissive friends.

Had he dreamt it all?

There was a mauve girl at the tea table drinking lemonade through a straw. A pink creature was on the grass leaning against a tree trunk. Some one was holding a cherry coloured parasol against the sun. A bull harassed by picadors with their nasty coloured rags could feel no more frantic than he at those colours. Vaguely and irritably he waved his hands before his face, as if to brush them away, out of sight. How could he see her, how could he find out anything about her with all those things round her?

A wave of heat engulfed him, as if the door of a furnace had been suddenly opened in his face, but the furnace he knew was inside him and the furious hot sensation was merely the sign to him of his own anger. He waited for it to subside.

He had left her to make up her mind. What had she decided? Was this her reply to the question he would never put to her? If so, what did it mean? How could he be supposed to interpret it? Was he never to know what she thought?

Would she never face him? Why should she barricade herself behind fools? What was the use of his years of self denial if his respect for her inviolate and sacred solitude was not enough to convince her of her safety with him?

Was it all wasted, the terrible continued restraint

that had cost him more energy than all his public activity? Was the manhood in him that he had burned up and consumed within himself for years, was all that precious power that he had gone on pouring into the abyss of his longing, was that not even enough to command her respect?

She was making fun of him as truly as if she had told them all about it and was laughing at him with them.

She had no inkling of what it all meant. She had no memory. She was perhaps after all not a human being. If she had had any inkling of what it all meant she would not have insulted them both by the presence of outsiders. If she had had any memory, she would have remembered that never once had he approached her, except at her bidding, or with her permission. If she were human, she would have taken pity on his ugly anguish.

She seemed to expect him to endure his loneliness with the sight of her before his eyes to mock him. No, he could not endure it. No, he would not. He would rather wring the necks of each one of those women. He would rather break the backs of each one of those men. He must know. He must have her secret, her soul, herself. He would have it, if he had to horsewhip her. He would strip her naked and beat her — he —

His mind stopped short. He saw her rise to her feet. Her white figure with its golden crown was straight as a taper against the green distance. He gazed upon her spellbound a moment, gasping, va-

cant, then with a groan went toward her. She was the same, good God. She had the same power. Her beauty meant the same thing to him.

"Here's W. B. at last."

"Hello, Bill, what's the news?"

"Billy dear, come here beside me on the grass, it's safer than a chair."

"We've been talking geography. No one knows quite where Serbia is."

"It's so beastly far, you know."

"You tell us, W. B., we're ready to learn."

Their voices buzzed round his ears like bothering insects but with a sensation of plunging through them, his head down, he made straight for Helen, and there, within a foot of her, he came to a standstill, abruptly, making an effort not to fall on her and crush her, astonished at the coolness of her face that received what he felt was his onrush. She looked him in the eyes, without speaking. The sun met her gaze, turning her eyes to amber, and diminishing their black pupils to pin points. They dazzled him. He seemed to be looking into wells of fire. He blinked.

"You've seen her before, you know, Billy," said a sly female voice. "She's your wife."

He wheeled as if stung, and felt the light waves of their laughter roaring and beating in his ears.

He must keep still, very still, so as not to hurt any of them. He half closed his eyes.

"You're too big, William, you shut out all the breeze," said Peggy from the grass.

"You're an impertinent little thing," he heard himself reply. He had always liked Peggy, why had she come to torment him? If she knew she would go away.

It occurred to him a moment later as he loomed there in their midst, that they were friends, his as well as Helen's. This fact was astonishing somehow. His first view of them had refused them any individuality or humanity. Now he saw them familiarly and their familiarity frightened him, for he remembered that they knew him only a little less well than he knew them, and he wanted no one to know him any more. If they turned their easy banter upon him and Helen he would pull the sky down onto their heads and bury them alive, every one of them — Millicent with her amethyst earrings dangling above her mauve frock, Mary Bridge with her cherry parasol, Peggy with her big baby eyes, he'd spare none of them if they showed the least sign of suspecting anything. Let them not suppose because they'd no secrets and no shame, that he would allow them to let their curiosity play upon Helen. As for the men they were easier to deal with. The men were after all men, more or less like himself. It had never been necessary to point out to them the difference between Helen and the other women they loved so gaily. He had been willing for them to look at her from a distance and no one of them had ever infringed on the liberty granted him. For ten years they had respected his attitude toward his wife. It had, he realized now, been one of his fixed

ideas, that their world, his and hers should admit their uniqueness. Happy and healthy, changing loves with the seasons, taking no trouble to dissimulate their passions and their raptures, they were pleasant beings, who still had enough sense to recognize that his house was different from their caravansaries.

He had liked them for respecting his idea. They were gentlemen and that gave one something to go on, but he would sacrifice all and each one of them if he gave the flicker of a sign of comprehending a difference between today and yesterday. Even Jimmy Gower, the faithful, never tiresome, always appreciative, would walk out of that house for ever did he seem to begin to see anything. After all, it was only Jimmy who would be likely to see, the others were too stupid or too absorbed in Peggy to notice.

Suspiciously, he looked from one to another, and he found their eyes fixed on him. Was it possible that they were innocent? Could it be that his rolls of fat concealed his quaking nerves from their gaze? How was one to tell in the midst of such well bred creatures? Their faces were disciplined to betray nothing. To flaunt their own caprices in the face of the world and to turn a blank stare back on all things disagreeable, that was their way.

He became aware of her hand holding out to him a cup of tea and he took the cup carefully, conscious of the dangerous fleeting proximity of those brown tapering fingers that curled nervously round the

saucer. They realized it and vanished from his line of vision leaving him staring at his own great flabby paw that he loathed.

Truly the marriage of those two hands was an outrage. The image of his, wide white and soft beside her slim palm revolted him.

"Other men who are ugly," he thought to himself, "are ugly in moderation, but there is so much of me, so much, too much." He had a feeling of lurching as he turned off with his cup.

"Tell us something," said some one.

"About Ireland."

"Or about Servia."

"Isn't it bounded on the north by the Danube?"

"What was said in Downing Street?"

There was a pause. They waited for an answer to that.

"I don't know," he muttered.

"What?"

"I didn't go to Downing Street."

"Bill darling, you mustn't tell lies," breathed Millicent.

Why in God's name wouldn't they leave him alone?

He did not want to talk. He wanted to stare at Helen and find out from her face what had happened since he had left her. If he kept his eyes on her, he would be sure to catch something. Sooner or later she would betray herself. Her face looked the same. Its outline was as clear as ever and the firm clear features maintained their strange harmony. It would take a long time for that face to

change. Its surface would not willingly betray her, neither would it easily take on the imprint of time. After all, it was hopeless looking at her. Looking always blinded him. The curious contrast between the pale crinkled gold of her hair and the darker, almost copper, tint of her face was distracting his attention from his search. In that darkly glowing oval, her teeth were like pointed diamonds. She was not sallow, but she was brown, and her cheeks were smooth and firm and all one perfect tint; an indescribably close, fine surface. Her jaw was strong, her forehead low. It was the lifted arch in the upper lip that made him think of them as pointed lips. Her eyelids were shaped like eyelids in Egyptian drawings. There was something ancient about the drawing of her eye-brows and nose.

"We're panting for news, Billy, while you stand there like a blinking mountain."

"You ought to know that I wouldn't tell you anything, if I had anything to tell."

"Why, Billy dear?"

"You're not to be trusted with secrets."

"Oh — Oh — Oh!"

They were very foolish. Was Helen never going to speak?

He heard Jimmy say to her in a low aside:

"You're very quiet, Helen."

Her murmured reply was scarcely audible, but he saw her smile. Why should she smile at Jimmy? It was hypocritical of her to smile at any one. He wondered if she would smile at him if he asked her

a question. He spoke straight at her in a loud voice:

"What have you been doing all day?"

"Nothing." Her face stiffened. It became rigid. Her eyes dilated.

It was true then that she was afraid of him.

He felt no pity for her now. The sight of her fear tempted him. He had a voluptuous feeling. He wanted her to be more afraid. To bring this about it was not necessary to do anything. He had only to will it.

"You are going to let us go home without one little crumb of news?" wailed Millicent.

"Yes." He didn't like Millicent. She was anæmic and whining.

"If you won't tell, then I shall make something up."

"Do."

"W. B., you're not a bit like yourself."

"On the contrary, I'm always uninteresting."

He spoke very softly. He wanted Helen to be more and more afraid.

"No, you look as if you were going to explode. It's a clue. That shall be my news. William Chudd is excited. They'll be impressed by that, for if you W. B. are excited, what must the rest of them be?"

"Pooh," said Mary Bridge. "I don't see what the murder of an Arch Duke in Servia has got to do with us."

"Hear, hear! We're an island."

"Let's be happy."

"We are."

"No one more so."

"But rather stupid," put in Peggy. "I wish my husband were a great mysterious man."

"Peggy dear!"

"Well really, no one could call Arthur great or mysterious could they? He's so very short I've begged him to wear high heels, but it's no use. Poor darling! He'll be wondering where I am, I've not seen him for a week though we've both been home several times since last Sunday."

"He said he lost you at Ascot."

"He loses things so easily." Peggy put on her hat wistfully. Her pure little face was turned sweetly to them all. She smiled lazily, and her eyes said as they always did: "Yes, love me, all of you. I'm incorrigible and though their name is legion, I'm a kind old thing."

She bent over Helen. "Good-bye, darling. I forgive you for forgetting the lingerie but I needed the things badly."

William watching, saw Helen clutch at the two little hands.

The group was breaking up about him.

"Come, William, put me into my car," said Peggy's voice. She had disengaged her hands. He followed her. They all came along, making a noise. If Peggy knew anything, she would never tell. Her sweetness was unruffled. She took Mary Bridge with her and Jimmy, and a new quiet man with a

brown face and lazy voice whom she seemed to like. Jim looked at him anxiously, Peggy waved a gay little hand.

There was a great fuss getting the rest of them off. He kept saying to himself: "She's alone at last." He anticipated her terror greedily. There was no one to protect her now. She would be obliged to reveal herself.

There was no sun in the garden when he got away from the last spirting motor. Helen stood like a figure of snow in the distance. The blue shadow of the trees was like cold water all around her. He drew nearer and saw that her eyes were fixed on him in a motionless widening stare. Her stare drew him on swiftly. His strides carried him through the cold space that separated them, in an instant, but the instant was too long for him to reach her. He had stretched out an arm and suddenly, just as if shot by a soundless bullet, she fell forward on her face, at his feet. He had still another wide step to go before bending down.

PART TWO

PART II

I

PARIS held its breath. The pulse of a nation's life seemed to have stopped its beating. It was as if the day, the incredible last day of July were not a day at all, but an absolute unlimited interval cut out of time. Beneath the little black numbers of a thousand calendars were written the invisible words "The end"; and between the era that was ended and the era that was to begin on the morrow, the day existed a thin impassible slice of nothingness.

In innumerable frightened houses, on strange silent streets the people waited. They waited for a word. As if petrified by the sight of some enormous medusa hanging in the hot summer sky the face of the city was turned to stone.

The word "War" hovered beyond the confines of the empty day. It was there hidden in the piled up stuff of tomorrow, like a flash of lightning hidden in layers of cloud that loomed tremendous against the edges of the horizon.

The oppressed people listened to the great clocks that were ticking out the time instant by instant, and each instant removed them a little further from the shore of the world they knew. They saw their occupations and their comfortable homes and their friends and their serenity of mind, like objects on

a receding land, fade into the distance; but they could not see what was ahead. Ahead was the steep wall of the precipice of war. It was a blank unscalable surface upon the face of which each one beheld the reflection of his own disturbed soul.

Nevertheless there were a great many people in Paris who had never been there before at the end of July. From across every section of the country they had come hurrying. The map of France had been covered with myriads of tiny scurrying specks converging from the seashore and the lakes and the mountains to the hot cities. No one wanted to be alone and no one wanted to be far away. Each had hurried to the centre of his interest. Each looked for the person to whom he belonged, and clung to the one who had shared with him the life that was ended; only the children were left by the seaside and the women who belonged to the children. As if by magic all the men in the world had disappeared from holiday places and the women who belonged to the men had gone with them.

The Princess of Narbonne had accompanied her son to Paris. He had left a yacht full of friends on the coast and had gone to fetch her in the grey chateau where she was dozing. There had been no question for either of them but of her going with him. She had taken her jewel-case in one hand and her stick in the other and had led the way, her head up and a mask on her wasted face.

She sat alone now in her sultry Paris garden surrounded by other gardens and the high white walls

of other shuttered houses. With one hand on the knob of her stick, she sat leaning slightly forward, staring at a bit of dusty ivy-covered wall and before her red rimmed eyes passed a succession of men, in strange uniforms, with clanking swords and proud faces, all the men of her family that she had seen go off to other wars.

Her son Jocelyn was in his room in the left wing, packing. If she lifted her head she could see the windows of his rooms that gave on to the garden, but she did not look that way. She was measuring her strength against the suffering ahead of her. Carefully, she would mete it out. She would not allow herself the luxury of any sudden pang, or any sweeping emotion.

Her attitude was one of defiance. She refused to acknowledge the fact that tomorrow her son's rooms would be empty; she would not admit that any harm could come to him; she defied the Heavens to break her heart. "I will have prayers said for him every day," she muttered to herself grimly. She would burn innumerable candles and neglect no courtesy to the celestial powers, but she would not be frightened. It was impossible to admit that her youngest son, the one person in the world who had ever called out of the languor of her heart an unquenchable passion of affection, should be taken from her in her old age. It was not for this that she had loved him.

Nevertheless, she felt that she knew the meaning of war. She remembered the horror of war spreading like a pestilence over the elegant society in which

she had reigned. Her husband had lost an arm in 1870. Her lover of that year had been killed. She remembered the feverish excitement of the salons of Paris, the arrival of the bad news in the middle of a ball. She had worn pale blue satin with silver slippers that night. Some women had fainted — one had had hysterics.

In those days men had fought for the emperor; there had been a certain elegance about war. To-day one fought for a France shorn of glory, clothed in the dull abhorrent garment of the Republic. One went to war, with the sons of the butcher, the baker, and the maire of one's village. Some fat tradesmen in a black coat had signed the papers for Jocelyn's mobilization.

The Government was despicable but it was right for her son to fight for his country. France belonged to such as he, the others were interlopers.

Behind the Princess, in the deep-shrouded rooms of the house, a bell tinkled. Slippered feet moved; shuffling across polished floors. Doors opened and closed.

"Pierre," she called. There was no answer. "Pierre," she repeated in a loud shrill tone and pounded with her stick on the stone floor of the terrasse.

An old man, in carpet slippers and a blue holland apron appeared blinking in one of the open windows behind her.

"Yes, Princess."

"What is it?" she demanded without turning.

"It is a note for Monsieur le Comte."

"A note?"

"Yes, Princess."

"What kind of a note?"

"A blue note, Princess."

"Don't be foolish, bring it here."

The old man advanced distressfully. His watery eyes wavered. The pale sunlight reflected from the white walls of the house made his bald pate shine like a polished globe. He handed the envelope to his mistress and began rubbing his knotted hands on his apron.

"I don't know the writing," she muttered.

"No, Princess."

"Who brought it?"

"A messenger boy, Princess."

"What kind of a boy?"

"An impudent rascal of a boy."

"Well, take it to the count."

"Yes, Princess."

"And then fetch your wife. I must talk to her about cooking us something for dinner."

"Very well, Princess."

The old man turned away. He was half across the terrace when she called after him:

"Was the boy in livery?"

"Yes, Princess. Hotel livery. The Meurice, I think."

"The hotel Meurice," she repeated shrilly, "where's that?"

Pierre threw out his hands in a gesture of exas-

perated surprise, but his voice remained respectful.

"The Princess does not know the Hotel Meurice? It is in the rue de Rivoli."

"How should I know? Do I ever cross the river? Well, well, go along."

Pierre disappeared into the house. The old lady crossed her two yellow hands on her stick and leaned further forward. Her long back did not bend; it looked as if it could not do so, without snapping, but she slanted forward toward those emaciated outstretched hands with their heavy diamond rings and her rigid white head under its folds of black lace quivered. She stared at the ground muttering.

The note with its unfamiliar bold writing had disturbed her. She had always resented being disturbed. All her life, she had economized her emotions and had opposed her will to any menace to her calm. Her business for forty years had been to remain beautiful. She had achieved this with unceasing pains. No unpleasant expression had been tolerated upon her features. No trouble had been allowed to mark her serenity. No person had been suffered who worried her. Jocelyn alone had penetrated beneath the perfect enamel of her worldly surface. He had weakened her, for him she was vulnerable. When suddenly, fifteen years ago, she had at the age of fifty on the death of her husband given up the world, and had stepped down from her throne there, she had continued in her seclusion the habits of her grandeur. Buried in her self-imposed solitude, she held court among the ghosts of her

brilliant past. Jocelyn alone of all living beings had entered the secret place of her mind's retirement. Her other sons and her daughter and her grandchildren had been relegated to the edges of her life. Their respectful devotion she accepted as a matter of course, but she took only a mild sceptical interest in their doings. Her grandchildren bored her; her eldest son annoyed her with eternal questions of the sale of forests and fields. Her daughter seemed to her much too undiscriminating in her tastes, she received artists and journalists and foreigners. Jocelyn alone amused her and tickled her fancy, and satisfied her pride. From him she demanded confidence, coming year by year to depend more and more upon the recital of his experiences for entertainment. His amusements she understood, and from her seclusion she participated in his capricious triumphs. She had in mind a series of definite images of the women who had taken his fancy. With a kind of vindictive pleasure she had watched their coming and going, the rising of their stars and their waning. She flattered herself that she was acquainted with them all, without knowing any of them. Of some she had mildly disapproved, but of none had she been jealous. Only one had troubled her peace of mind, a strange foreign woman that her son had once brought bodily into her presence. She had been obliged to give lunch to the great anglo-saxon creature, the first foreigner who had been invited to a meal in her house since the day that the present Czar had dined there.

She remembered the Englishwoman now with her great yellow eyes and broad shoulders. There had been something dangerous about her. She had not dared express to Jocelyn her feeling of antipathy, nor had Jocelyn confided in her on that occasion. She had been glad when Yvonne her daughter had told her that the woman had left Paris. She could not understand Yvonne's interest in foreigners.

It occurred to her now that there was something foreign about the handwriting on the envelope. Suppose that this woman or some other from her cold savage country were to make an appearance at this moment. It would be more than she could bear.

She had summoned all her energy to meet the hour of separation. Moment by moment she was letting it approach her. Lower and lower she crouched to meet it, so that it might not overturn her when it came. She had commanded her will to uphold her, but to succeed she must be undisturbed. Keeping still was now an effort that needed the concentration of all her powers. She felt that if she let go of herself for one moment she would crumble to pieces. If a stranger should come upon her now, the shock would knock her down.

"Dust to dust—" the words stared at her from the ground. Her bones were brittle. One blow and they would go to the dust they were made of.

She was conscious of a sharp stabbing pain in her side. Jocelyn was her son. He was her own. She was about to send him away to the war. . . .

A feeling of faintness came over her. She seemed to be falling forward toward the stone flags of the terrace, and a voice seemed to whisper to her out of the sultry air.

"You are old. You cannot fight against fate any longer. You are about to be left alone. Your child is being taken away from you. What will be left to you? What have you done for your son to fit him for life or for death? You have lived for fetishes always. Shams have been your treasures. Now you will be punished. He will be killed."

Convent bells were ringing. Their notes came floating across the surrounding labyrinth of streets and gardens.

The princess straightened herself with a jerk. Was she a weak woman fool, to be tormented now by her conscience? That was all very well for peasants and superstitious people. The church urged repentance, but she, what had she to regret? She had been the greatest lady of her time.

Her black eyes under their shrivelled reddened lids flashed, like brilliant stones in a dilapidated setting. The thin loose layer of worn yellow flesh that covered the proud bones of her face worked erratically. The shaking of her head was plainly visible against the white wall behind her.

Toward her quivering figure the pealing notes of the convent bells came rolling. They were waves of silvery sound that broke against her black decrepitude. Her brittle body shook under the undulating

pressure of their contact. She was weak, she was old; her beautiful being had long ago turned to wreckage. No blood in the long pale veins of her body mounted to her face to meet the living air. No breath of life in her dry heart went out to meet the mystery of the beauty of the dying day. The sweet light of the heavens hovering above the hushed and fearful city, found her eyes glaring above a thin column of dead bones and flesh, while once again she opposed to the menace of truth the skeleton of her indomitable pride. She thought:

"Jocelyn will not be killed. No harm will come to him, but I would rather he were killed than caught in the toils of that woman. He would want to marry her. The men of his family do not marry divorced middle class women. His forefathers knew how to live and how to die. They knew what was permitted."

When the pealing of the bells ceased her head was no longer shaking. She sat erect in the deepening shadow, a black effigy on a throne passing in review the elegant ghosts of her memory.

Pierre, the concierge, had darted into the house, scurrying through the dim salons where marble columns and shrouded sofas were reflected in the great mirrors and gleaming parquets, down a dark corridor and up three steps, to a door at which he knocked.

"Entrez!"

He entered a place of confusion. Two flushed

young men in their shirt sleeves looked up at him from a quite extraordinary disorder. In the middle of the floor was the regulation iron trunk of the French officer and around this spreading over rugs, tables, chairs and sofas, was a litter of objects: boots, boot-jacks, breeches, coats, leather cases, sponges, bottles, piles of linen, revolvers, soap, letter paper.

Jocelyn de St. Christe was on his knees before the trunk, a pair of scarlet cavalry breeches in his hands. Behind him, in the window, his friend, Guy de Brissac, was polishing a sword with the tail of a flannel shirt.

"A note for Monsieur le Comte," quavered Pierre.

"Well, give it here. It's nothing to be emotional about, my poor old one."

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur Jocelyn, it's not the note."

"I know, I know. But what will you? Don't take on."

"But will Monsieur le Comte ever arrive? Does Monsieur le Comte propose to put all that in that box?"

"No, no, not all, a half, a quarter. Here — The note, it came?"

"By messenger."

"Ah, I see." St. Christe stood up. He fingered the note as if it were ever so slightly unpleasant to the touch. His glance at the address had

slanted off out of the window. He seemed to be pursuing there in the treetops a fugitive and annoying idea.

Pierre waited. His waiting was ignored. The note in the fastidious fingers was ignored. The disorderly present was ignored.

Pierre was too old to be patient.

"At your service, Monsieur le Comte," he muttered fretfully. Receiving no answer he screwed his pale eyes toward the silent young gentleman in the window and withdrew, but outside the door he stopped and stuck his bald head once more into the room.

"Monsieur le Comte dines this evening with Madame la Princesse? It is because of the fowl."

"Yes, yes."

His old head was gone.

Jocelyn de St. Christe opened the letter delicately. It took an instant to read, and was tossed to his friend.

"The beautiful Madame Chudd, who falls from heaven," he enunciated concisely. His lips clipped off the words neatly. His fine eyes under lifted arching eyebrows watched the slip of paper undergo the scrutiny of his friend. It took an instant to read, a second time, and was laid on the table. There were only a dozen words to it. They stared up from the paper at the ceiling. "Dear friend, I have come. You will find me at the Hotel Meurice at any hour of the day. Faithfully yours, Helen."

The two men, so many times larger, so very much more important than that thin sheet of paper, looked at each other across it. Their look conveyed a perfect understanding of such a fine discriminating quality as to make conversation almost unnecessary.

"At this moment," murmured Brissac.

"You will admit that it is not the moment."

The letter became for an instant the object of their converging unfriendly glances. Then the two pairs of eyes looked at each other with sympathy.

St. Christe lifted his shoulders and pushed his hands into his pockets.

"I understand nothing, but nothing at all," he brought out after turning his back and then facing round again. It was impossible to walk up and down on the crowded floor.

"As for that — Does one ever understand?"

"Tomorrow I leave for Rheims."

"Just so."

"After that, God knows where."

"Exactly."

"Tomorrow, the depôt; the next day war."

"Well, perhaps not the next day."

"There remains tonight," announced Jocelyn.

Brissac had begun again the polishing of the sword hilt. He did not lift his eyes.

"There remains, as you say, tonight," he echoed.

His attitude suggested that he had no opinions and no ideas on this or any other subject. His sleek head, his square shoulders, his fine well kept hands, conveyed an impression of exquisite and ele-

gant discretion. One felt certain to look at him, that none of those closely knit nicely modelled limbs of his could ever make a false movement. Never would either of his smartly shod feet take a misstep. One could trust them to the most difficult and intricate paths.

Their way, at the moment, their owner was saying to himself, was out of the door. Silence had followed his last phrase. He laid the sword beside the letter on the table and began putting on his coat. It was a beautifully fitting coat. He was buttoning it up when St. Christe rapped out sharply through tight lips.

"But it's not done. One simply doesn't do it."

Brissac looked at the fine lean face of his friend through narrowed eyes. The flutter of his eyelids expressed the faintest shade of surprise, but the sound that his neat mouth emitted was a grunt with a definite intonation of sympathy and it drew from the other the sudden nervous query:

"What shall I do?" to which Brissac retorted: "What does she expect you to do?" whereupon St. Christe followed up quickly with a kind of exasperated hiss: "That's just it; I don't know."

The surprise on Brissac's face betrayed an obvious incredulity, but it passed unnoticed.

"You see, I don't even know why she left. She disappeared at the moment of my highest expectations without explanation, without warning. I went

round one day and found her gone. No word since then. Not a word all this time. Two months; my letters unanswered, and now, suddenly she arrives, on the eve of the war."

"Perhaps she knows nothing of the danger."

"Then why has she come?"

"A whim, a remorse."

"But she must know. Her husband I am told is one of the confidential advisers of his Government."

"Then she has come to say good-bye."

"Ah, there you are. She may have come to say good-bye."

"In which case?" queried Brissac.

"In which case," cried St. Christe, "she is mad." He threw up his hands and flung himself forward on the open window-sill and began drumming on the stone ledge with his fingers.

He thought.

"It is impossible, what she has done. She puts me in an impossible position. I cannot go to her. It is too dangerous. If I went I would stay; she is not wise. We would both be seriously compromised. Beside, I have other things to think of now. This is no moment for a love affair. In a week I may be dead. I have hundreds of things to do before tomorrow. And there is my mother."

He could see his mother down below on the terrace. Her black solitary figure seemed to him very small and pitiful beneath the broad façade of the house with its rows of high shuttered windows. She

did not look up at him. Her head was bent over her hands that were clasped on her stick. She looked as if she were praying.

"You don't want to see her then?" Brissac asked behind him.

"No, I don't want to see her. I have only to-night. I must spend tonight with my mother." The words were spoken slowly and with a certain solemnity.

Brissac moved toward the door. He thought that a groan floated back to him from the head beyond the window. He hesitated. On his part there was timidity now, to meet the solemnity of his friend.

"Shall I go to the Meurice and tell her that you have left?"

"Yes, do that. Ugh! this is most painful."

"It won't seem important a month from now."

"No, I suppose not, but she is proud, the proudest woman I've ever known."

"You forget that she will never know that you know."

"Yes, yes. And there is my mother. She has a right; she has every right."

"I'm off then — unless you will go yourself for half an hour."

Jocelyn turned. He shook his head.

"Too dangerous," he muttered. "She would keep me. I'm afraid of her; you see her, you tell her; I leave it to you. It's better so. There's no time. Good God man, the Germans may cross the frontier tomorrow. How can one begin a love

affair at such a moment? End one? Yes, perhaps, but begin. No. Take a new mistress the night of the end of the world? No, truly, it's not worth while; one doesn't do it."

"Good-bye then till tomorrow."

"Good-bye."

II

JOCELYN DE ST. CHRISTE was thirty-five years old and for thirty-five years he had enjoyed himself. His nature was on the whole a happy one. Circumstances had conspired to please him. If he had inherited any of the austere intolerance of his parents, the trait had been buried beneath a charming layer of softness. Life had always caressed him. Its caresses had given him a genial brilliance. He carried light with him into the dimmest salon. People hovered about him like moths round a candle.

He had become an artist in the enjoyment of life: giving pleasure and receiving it in the most attractive way possible had been his occupation since his tutor had proclaimed him a man.

He was in harmony with his world. Its limitations seemed to him pleasant, it's prejudices honourable. His people had, at the birth of the Republic, cut themselves off from all public activity. They considered themselves bound in honour to love France and loathe the Government and do nothing about it. It had never occurred to him to consider their attitude as unfortunate. The world had presented itself to him as a treasure house wherein he could let his taste gratify itself. His taste was considered infallible. He had been too busy, exercis-

ing the faculty of choice, to consider any of his vitality as wasted. Selection, comparison, minute observation of beautiful objects, this had occupied him, and if women had become for him the most engrossing of objects, taking up more of his time than rare bibelots or old bindings, it was because they, rather than he, wanted it to be so. Women loved him.

He was grateful to them for being so nice to him. Scarce any of them had caused him a pang. His occasional duels had not been concerned with them. He cultivated certain prejudices in order, as he put it, not to get too lazy. Israelites were to him an abomination. He laughed at them and occasionally picked a quarrel with one, just to prove that his sustained contempt was dangerous. Secretly, he was proud of being considered the best swordsman in Paris. An obscure instinct impelled him, now and then to run after danger. He called it amusement, but it was deeper than that. At bottom he felt life to be too easy. His gratitude to the women who were kind to him would have been greater had they been less easily kind. Of late years, he had even begun to feel that he would enjoy suffering for a change. Being incapable of inflicting it upon himself, he had gently experimented in it with others, but to humiliate a woman and tease a man to exasperation was not on the whole worth while. He was beginning to wonder whether some day he might not after all be dreadfully bored, when Helen Chudd stepped across his horizon. She had been admirably difficult. Her coldness had been just the tonic he

wanted. The aspect of her splendid struggle against him, had thrilled him. He had been moved, as he had never been moved before and had been on the verge of adoring her, when she had disappeared. For a month afterwards he had been angry. The experience was peculiar. Resuming once again the pleasures of habit he had discovered that the boredom he had dreaded as a distant peril, was now suddenly upon him.

The summons of the country calling him to prepare for war had been an immense relief.

He had left his agreeable rather tiresome friends in a state of exalted excitement.

The sight of his mother's valiant horror had been to him the first sign of monstrous disaster. On her stricken face he had read the message of fear. Because he had always feared her, and had never quite lost his child's feeling of awed belief in her tyrannical power, the sudden realization of her helplessness had made him understand the immense catastrophy. He saw her, minute and frail, in a desolate world. She appeared to him, suddenly, just a helpless old woman in danger. The fact had disturbed him profoundly.

Their trip to Paris, which should have taken four hours, had been interminable. The train had been twelve hours late. They had spent the night in a compartment with six other people. He had been unable to get her any food. In the stuffy dark of the carriage, he had discerned her sitting upright in her corner, a grim, tortured figure. She had

scarcely spoken a word. Leaning over her, at intervals during the night, he had stroked her hand. The lights of passing trains had shown him her face, dry and gray with wide open eyes. He had been afraid the fatigue would kill her. The thought kept recurring that in a few hours, he would no longer be near to protect her.

They had arrived in Paris at nine o'clock in the morning. There was no one to meet them at the station. He had managed to find a fiacre to drive them home. The coachman and the groom and the two footmen had already gone. The butler they had left in the country. There was no one in the house but the concierge and his wife, who had not received the telegram announcing their arrival. The house had welcomed them like a familiar tomb. He had opened the windows and had helped old Jeannette make his mother's bed but she had refused to lie down on it. All day she had been sitting in the garden. He had been obliged to leave her alone there. Without his valet, packing had assumed hideous difficulties. Guy de Brissac had turned up and had tried to help him. They had been interrupted by the apparition of Helen Chudd. Everything remained to be done. It was getting late. He left at seven o'clock the next morning.

The aspect of his disordered room dismayed him. It showed him the upheaval of the world. With his well-ordered tasteful life torn to pieces, he felt himself a nonentity, a naked two-legged creature, insignificant and impotent. He was starting out to

war, with a crowd of men naked and ugly all exactly like himself. There would be no one he knew there in that vast and horrid confusion; there would be no one to help him. He would be alone. He was going to flounder out there and die in some horrid dirty way.

His head throbbed. It was full of annoying and troublesome ideas that he could not sort out. Obviously, his first task was to finish packing. He hung idly over his box. What was he to take with him to the war? A lot of little objects, a bottle of hair wash, a shaving stick and a confusion of pleasant memories.

It occurred to him that the very pleasantness of those memories was a source of weakness to him now. Out of the fabric of the past, he must make himself an armour for the future. From what was fine and strong and durable in his experience, he must supply himself with a defensive covering for his naked soul. He searched about in his mind for the stern stuff of resistance. For the life of him he could think of nothing that would bear the weight of half a dozen good blows of the hammer of danger except the image of his mother's tyrannical idolatry. Out of his mother's love he could make himself a shield. For the rest, he saw himself going off to war, in an armoured suit made of tinsel.

He said to himself: "Suppose that I were to be afraid. What should I do then?" but he could not answer the question and he knew that he could never answer it until the war was over. It would

always be there, hanging over him. He would never be sure that he was not going to turn coward tomorrow. The idea of disgracing his name made him feel sick. He fell to packing desperately, throwing things into his box and pounding them down.

Certain kinds of danger he felt confident that he could meet with success. Anything in the nature of a hand to hand fight with swords for instance, or a sudden spectacular attack, anything in fact that appealed to his dramatic sense but what he was not sure of was the stealthy thing that crawled at you from behind, or the great slow enveloping thing that covered you with the desolate conviction of death. Suppose he were left alone with a handful of men somewhere in a wood, in a field, behind a hill and the regiment went off and forgot them, and there was nothing to do but wait and no one to communicate with and the growing conviction upon one that they were cut off. Could he stand it? Was he sure that something wouldn't snap? and that he wouldn't just — turn tail and run like hell?

What was it that kept men solid on a quaking earth? Pride, Faith. A deep affection that they could not betray. His only affection, he came back to it again, was his affection for his mother. Would that help him?

Faith? In what? The good God was waiting for one to die and the saints with him were waiting to welcome one. They would hinder rather than help. Pride? He had always believed he had

enough of that for anything, but what was he proud of? His name, the record of his family, the brave deeds of his ancestors? Certainly he was not proud of anything that he himself had done. It had never occurred to him as necessary to earn self-esteem. Suppose he was killed at once before he could do something admirable. He would not have one thing to his credit on the other side of death and would leave no monument behind him. The saints would look at him and say: "What has he got to show for his life?" And some one would answer: "A collection of old Sèvres, some of the finest 'Rose de Barry' in existence and a chest full of women's letters."

He gave a loud laugh. His desk was crammed with letters. He must destroy them. Why under heaven had he kept them all? He had kept them out of vanity. Some day he had actually intended reading them over.

Crossing to his secretaire, he opened one of its drawers with a key. There they were, neatly arranged in packets. They inspired him with disgust. He saw himself at that table, idiotic, sentimental, eternally answering the notes of amourous ladies. What good would such a man do in a battle? His eyes falling on his sword became fascinated. That was to be his best friend now. He pulled it out of its sheath. How was it that he had been taught to manipulate it? There would be no rules in this duelling. Suppose he were on his horse, and the German on the ground, he could then bring it down

so, on the back of the fellow's neck. Suppose he missed and the man lunged upward, got his horse in the belly, brought him down. On his feet in the mêlée, he must slash out. They would be on all sides of him. He lunged, right and left. A bit of china fell to the floor, and lay in pieces. Ah, to kill, to kill, to rip them open. Once one was in it, it would not be so bad. He would account for his man anyway, the man that was destined to bar his way.— But suppose he failed. Suppose his nerve gave way, suppose he were seized with panic, and scrambled on a horse, and turned tail, and ran —

This was nonsense. Here he was like a clown, brandishing his sword about and nothing was done.

He must anyhow tear up these letters. It would not be safe to leave them there. One never knew. He might not come back. And there was that affair of the farm that he had decided to sell. He must, positively, write to those people and have the hundred thousand francs by next month. Next month he might be dead. His brother would get the money.

He began tearing up envelopes. Not one of these women meant anything to him now. No woman in the world had left with him, even a feeling of loss, except Helen Chudd, and now Helen was here and he was not in the mood to see her. There were bills to be paid in that small upper drawer. He would write the cheques and leave them with his mother.

"Votre folle Jacqueline." He looked absently at those words on the mauve sheet of note paper.

Who was Jacqueline? He could not remember. He could remember no one, but Helen Chudd. She was there, just across the river, separated from him by a few streets. He remembered her precisely and he saw her suddenly in her room at the Meurice, waiting for him. He could recall his own feeling on seeing her for the first time. He had said to himself in a flash: "There she is," just as if he had been expecting her all his life. His inward exclamation had been a note of triumph. He had recognized her as the person for whom all his time of selecting and scrutinizing had been a preparation.

After that he had seen her in countless attitudes, in innumerable settings. For a week he had refrained from asking to be presented to her and had gone to every place where she was, just to look at her. He remembered the quality of his inward glow during that week. It resembled nothing so much as the golden glow of the collector who has discovered some priceless perfect object and is so lost in ecstatic contemplation that he does not even covet its possession.

She had resented his behaviour. He remembered her glaring at him magnificently. Subsequently he had found himself confronted so often by her long back and disdainful averted head that he had been forced to bring his blissful detachment to an end. She had acknowledged his presence icily and had conveyed to him the most perfect sense of his own impertinence. That had stung him. He had been near losing his head. Artifice had been thrown

aside. He had plunged deep, with one leap into the dark well of her seduction. He had had at moments the feeling of drowning. Her magnetism was immense.

She had remained for him an enigma. Her coldness had conveyed the promise of immeasurable wonders. Then suddenly, she had disappeared. Now, again, she was there. He imagined her standing in the ugly hotel room, looking down out across the Rue de Rivoli and the Tuileries gardens. Her gaze was directed straight to the spot where he was sitting. It travelled across the dusty trees, the white street, the slate roofs. He could see her lifted head, her slightly dilated nostrils, her pointed upper lip.

"Hélene," he muttered to himself.—"Hélene." He buried his head in his hands. Through the open windows, the bells of the Benedictine Chapel came pealing. His room with its silken hangings and gleaming furniture, all covered over with the confusion of his packing, was filled with the sound of the bells. His head throbbed. He imagined Helen's voice speaking to him as it had sometimes spoken. Its richness had a slight roughness that had always been to him inexpressibly disturbing. It vibrated now in his ears: "Come to me. I have come to fulfil my promise. Come to me before it is too late."

Suddenly, he knew that all he wanted in life was to see her once more. He had been mad to send Guy to her. It was inevitable that he himself should see her. She had willed it.

But Guy had gone. He was already with her. The thing was settled. He groaned aloud.

It seemed to him that could he see her she would do him some marvellous good. He saw that he had missed something divine in her that he might have found. He thought of her soul and believed that he might have known it. He recognized the beauty of her coming. She had come to give him herself in a superb and final gesture of farewell, that would protect him long after when he was alone. Why had he not understood an hour ago? Why had he never understood her? If he had, he would not be lonely now. Guy would have told her the lies they had arranged between them. It was indecent to lie to her. Why not go to her anyhow, make a clean breast of it, tell her the truth? And find with her in his hour of imminent peril the wonder of wonders in which he had never believed. He should have been truthful. He could still be.

There was a knock at the door.

"What — what is it?" he shouted. "Come in. What do you want?"

"The Princess sends word that dinner will be served in her boudoir in half an hour," said old Pierre, sticking in his head.

"Dinner? Half an hour? What time is it?"

"It is a quarter to eight."

"No — Very well. Very well. Tell the Princess I'll be down presently."

He swept the last scraps of paper into the grate. So much for old love letters. There they were all

of them, a mass of little scented scraps of paper. He touched a match to them remembering too late that Helen's note was among the lot. She had never written him before. He had nothing of hers, not a souvenir of any kind.

His hands were very dirty. This annoyed him. He had always taken great care of his hands. He remembered while cleaning his fingernails (one was torn) that he must show Pierre after dinner about oiling the motor he was leaving in the garage and must give him instructions about the two ponies that were to go to the country. He could do this and be at the Meurice by nine-thirty. There would still be time.

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III

HE did not at first see his mother on entering her boudoir. Candles were lighted on the chimney piece and a small table was laid for their evening meal. Her favourite chair was drawn up to the window, its high silken back half turned to the door. It was a stiff, but commodious armchair of the Louis XVI period with rounded side-pieces curving out to enclose its occupant, and round the edge of one of these his mother invariably turned with a bobbing duck of her head to greet him when he opened the door. Now with a slight tremor of apprehension he noticed the absence of the familiar amusing gesture. She was there, he ascertained a moment later, but she had fallen asleep and had slid down into a crumpled heap against the stiff brocaded back of her chair. Her head had fallen to one side, and rested against the worn golden wood of one of its curved wings. The relaxation of her usual rigid pose appeared to have dislocated her body. Her thin limbs lay together lifeless and disjointed under the black covering of her merciful clothes. He had the feeling that if he lifted her up in his arms, she would fall to pieces.

He leaned over her; fearfully approaching his lips to her white hair. There were tears in his eyes. Never had he seen her so exposed in all the defence-

less unattractiveness of her old age. Sleep had stolen from her the disguise of her dignity. She was a pitiful old woman. His heart ached for her.

Under the pressure of his lips, she started, quivering. Her eyes opened. She turned her head, looking up from the black depths of her dreams, in terror. "Oh — oh!" she cried softly and made little quick whimpering sounds. Her shaking hands clutched him.

"C'est toi," she whimpered; "c'est toi."

He kissed her forehead and she leaned it against his coat for a moment. Never had he seen her like this. She was like a little frightened child, and yet how old she was! Her lean old fingers travelled round his head like the fingers of a blind woman.

"Yes, little mother. I have come for dinner."

She sat up, half pushing him away.

"I have been dreaming, such dreadful dreams."

Her voice had hardened suddenly. She dismissed him and them and her weakness with a wave of the hand. Her hand was transformed. It had implored his comfort like a blind frightened thing a minute before; it was now an imperious hand accustomed to being obeyed. He obeyed it and moved away, taking his stand in front of the chimney between the two lighted candelabras, on the other side of the room. The moment of his walking three steps with his back to her had been enough. Looking again he observed that a miracle was accomplished. She sat bolt upright and her black eyes gleaming out at him challenged him to an admission

of weakness, either his, or hers. Her will working like the invisible artist behind the scene of the guignol had pulled the necessary strings. Her features and her limbs were in place again. He felt like applauding. The word "Bravo" sounded within him.

She pointed a long finger. "Ring for dinner to be served," she commanded; and actually, as she said the words, her long arm outstretched, the shadow of the ghost of her beauty fell upon her.

"How she must have ruled them," he thought as he did her bidding, and he looked round the crowded walls of the faded shining room as if appealing to all those silent witnesses of her glory that looked out from their little golden frames. The pale silken panels of the room were studded with miniatures, so many of them, so close together on the lustrous surface, that the place had the air of a jewelled casket. He knew them all. They had been named to him in his childhood. Some of them he had seen in the flesh, but not those by whom he had been the most impressed. For years during his boyhood he had had personal relations with the little exquisite people. He had had feelings of reverence for the proud-nosed men in white wigs; he had been sentimental about some of the pretty ladies. When during his studies he came upon their names in the history of his country, he had often had a glow of pride or of friendliness, or sometimes of mortification. It had been noticeable and sometimes confusing that the facts concerning them as told by

his mother and as recounted by historians did not always corroborate each other. His great great-uncle, a cardinal, had had his ears cut off during the Revolution. The fact was nowhere denied, but its causes and the motive attributed to it were various and contradictory. On the whole he had gathered the impression that his innumerable ancestors and relations had been almost constantly getting into trouble, and that between them, what with their scope of influence in the Church and with the Crown and among the embassies of foreign countries, they had found a wide field for making it. They seemed to have been arrogant, restless people, with now and then flashes of extraordinary brilliance. The women, some of them beautiful, had not always been circumspect. Several had died violent deaths. One, the prettiest, had been given poison, it was alleged, by her own husband, who had refused to allow her to accept the favours of the king. They now looked bland enough in their minute and polished elegance. Their portraits on ivory, some of them in oval frames studded with pearls, represented a large sum of money. His mother had had very generous offers for the collection; she would leave it, the collection, to him and he was to leave it in turn to the museum of the Louvre.

He thought vaguely of all these people, while he waited for dinner. On the whole, the soldiers in his family had the best record. The churchmen had amassed fortunes, and the diplomats had spent them. The men who had gone to war had won

glory. He was going to war the next morning. He would take a ticket and get on the train —

"Henriette came to see me," his mother was saying.

"Henriette? Who is Henriette?"

"Your cousin, Henriette de Vaumont."

"The ugly old maid with the crooked face?"

"Yes, if you must be unkind about the excellent creature. She leaves for Alsace tomorrow. She belongs to a group of nurses who go to the army at once."

"But Alsace is in the hands of the Germans."

"It has been for some time, but they don't think it will be for much longer."

"I see, Henriette de Vaumont is going to occupy Alsace. Well, she's nearly big enough to do it. If she put out one foot and stepped —"

"You're not nice. She has a heart of gold."

"I've no doubt."

"And I wish I were going with her."

He gaped: "What?"

"Yes, and I'm thinking of doing something like it. I see no reason why I shouldn't organize a hospital. One must have an occupation," she added grimly.

"Seriously?"

"Seriously."

"Where?"

"Here, I shall turn all the ground floor into wards for the wounded."

"But you have had no experience in such things."

"I shall learn."

"You will fatigue yourself terribly."

"Yes, perhaps; I expect that."

He continued to gape at her. She was surprising, she was admirable, she was obstinate, she was incredibly pathetic.

"But you are no longer young, dear mother, and you have never done anything like this," he ventured.

"As I say, one must find new occupations," she rejoined irritably. "One must begin again."

"But I hope your life will not be so very different, after all."

She silenced him: "You will not be there," she said shortly.

He was glad of the grimness in her voice. His feeling was one of immense relief. He knew that he could rely upon her to protest with all her being against his annihilation and her own fear for him. She appeared to him powerfully real. She was not only splendid and touching, she was also a guarantee and a protection. He saw her rising up in her gaunt old age, to protect him, to dispute him with death, to exorcise from his path the powers of darkness.

"You, my child, will worry yourself less about me if you know I am occupied," he heard her say. He understood that her effort was for him, more than for herself, and something sublime in her love for him touched him now, for the first time.

Old Pierre bringing in a fried sole on a platter

and a dusty bottle of Burgundy announced that the Princess was served. They sat down opposite one another at the small table. He touched her hand across it and watched the fleeting sweetness of her answering smile play hide and seek through the bitter wrinkles of her withered face.

Beyond the long window, the sultry day died slowly, reluctantly, as if sickening to death with foreboding. Above the treetops of the breathless enclosed garden that was like a well, the sky was aglow with the lights of the city, that seemed far distant. The occasional hoot of a far away motor was the only sound that broke the stillness.

Confronted by food St. Christe had a feeling of suffocation. It was impossible to eat. He thought to himself: "This house is like a prison on an island." He wanted suddenly to get out on the boulevards and feel the crowd jostling him. He thought of Helen waiting. Maybe she was no longer waiting. She seemed very far away. He wondered how he could get to her without alarming his mother. He must invent some imperative errand.

"You had no disturbing news this afternoon?" asked the princess.

"No, nothing; a note from a friend, of no importance." He felt himself flushing. He imagined that her eyes were reading his thoughts. Their burning gaze penetrated him uncomfortably, but his mind dodged her idea and continued its dangerous imaginings.

If Helen had been free, he would have married her. Strange that he had never thought of that before. He had never wanted to marry. — Wives had always been connected in his mind with settlements and the ordered business of founding a family. Marriage he had thought tiresome and he had chosen not to be tired. To his mother's argument in favour of the institution he had always replied that as he was not the head of the family and she had already four grandchildren and as he knew that she liked to have him to herself just as he was, he could not take her too seriously. She had not insisted; she had even admitted that another daughter-in-law would add nothing to her happiness.

But if he had a wife and children now, he would feel less lonely. Had he been given a son to survive him, death would not be final. He would not be so soon forgotten. Another Jocelyn de St. Christe, the image of himself, made of the stuff of his own life, would continue to live on the earth.

He looked at his mother with the words on his lips: "I ought to have married," but he saw that she was agitated and refrained.

"What is it, my mother?" he asked caressingly.

"Nothing, nothing."

"But yes, there is something, tell me."

"Well, it is that note. Pierre brought it to me, and I feel you are hiding something from me."

His heart sank. He realized that long ago he had prepared by his minute confidences this little unwelcome moment. Her jealousy had in the past

amused him. He had pampered it. Tonight was no time for taking a stand against it.

"Foolish mother. It was a note from a friend who has arrived from London, and who wanted to see me. You have met her, Madame Chudd."

"Ah, the Englishwoman."

He was startled by the fierce shuddering breath that carried the words.

"Yes, she is English."

"You thought her beautiful."

"She is indeed very beautiful."

"I did not, as I remember, agree with you about her beauty."

"No? I thought you rather admired her."

"On the contrary."

He hesitated. His mother had been speaking with what seemed to him unnecessary energy. He felt the need of being cautious.

"As for that," he resumed mildly after a moment, "our respective tastes in beauty have not always coincided. It has amused us to differ."

"On this occasion I was not amused; I disliked the English woman intensely."

"That," he replied quickly, "you never told me." Under the sting of her remark he had flushed again, but this time hotly.

"No," she went on, rapping out her words as if with a hammer. "I saw that you were very absorbed; you chose to go so far as to bring her to this house. I understood that any advice from me would have been useless."

"You mean that you would have warned me against her?"

"Yes, she is dangerous."

They were both silent. He was confused and disturbed. What disturbed him most was that his mother had voiced with conviction just the same fear that he himself had had. Helen was dangerous; he agreed, but he had had no idea that his mother thought about her or even remembered her. Her prejudice and her awakened suspicions seemed to him formidable things with which to have to deal. She was terribly strong at all times, and now she had the added weapon of her imminent loss of him. He was too sorry for her to dare to hurt her, and he thought: "Tomorrow morning she will wake up, again, frightened, like a little child, as she did an hour ago. And I will be gone."

His face was clouded over and she watched his face with the eyes of a hawk, her waxen cheeks growing more waxen, the lines about her withered mouth deepening. Strange, that she did not leave him alone, she who knew him so well, and every expressive line and every tell-tale hue of his flushing sensitive skin. She might have trusted him to be good to her as he had never failed to be, but she was impelled to go on prodding him.

"It was so surprising your bringing her to lunch. It seems to me that I was very civil. As for that, she assumed my cordiality; I but followed her lead."

He winced. She saw him wince and her eyes gleamed.

"Her manner," she began again.

But he was by now exasperated.

"Her manner," he broke in, "was perfect." And then more lamely he added:

"Yvonne admired her."

"As much as one can admire any one so much unlike oneself."

"You think her so very unlike us?"

"Enormously."

"Well," he cried in a new burst of courage, "she is unlike any one and every one. Put it that there is no one like her and I'll agree with you."

At the fervour of this declaration the Princess shuddered and closed her eyes. She seemed to shrink in size, her features trembled and appeared about to decompose.

"My poor child," she whispered; "my poor child."

He took her hands, both of them, in his own across the table, bringing his face close to hers. He was not sure that this last weakness was genuine. He suspected her of acting a part. He felt that she was playing on him too cleverly.

"I loved her," he said with a slow deliberate distinctness. "She is wonderful, I still love her."

Her eyelids flickered and were lifted above her near staring eyes, that met his defiantly.

"She would have ruined you."

"How?"

"She would have made a scandal. Unheard of things would have happened."

"What things?"

"Her husband would have divorced her."

They stared at each other.— It was after all his eyes that wavered.

"You mean?" he hesitated —"you think —"

"I know," she announced with finality.

He left her at that abruptly and began walking up and down the room, feeling nervously all the while that her triumphant eyes followed him. He had a sense of defeat and extreme depression. Old Pierre came and went, dismally, clearing the table. His jerky disconsolate movements, his shaking head and wheezing lungs, were annoying. At last he brought in the coffee and went away closing the door after him.

There was no longer any shimmer of twilight beyond the window. The dreadful breathless day had been swallowed up forever and the swift rolling blackness of night was hurrying the world to disaster. The little shining room was close as an air tight box. All about it was the oppression of darkness, and *war;* beyond and above the dark, was looming higher and higher, a vast and terrific cloud that would burst on the morrow. St. Christe shuddered. He had a vision of the thing crashing upon that room like an unnatural tempest, a monstrous bolt of destruction that would crush the frail treasures to powder. His mind struggled under the weight of his apprehension. Each thought was a thin streamer, weighted with lead, that fell like a plummet into the depths of his hopelessness. What good would it do

to struggle against the dreadful old tyranny of his mother, when the morning waited to consume him? Of what use fighting for an hour's freedom when to-morrow he would be a slave of a power a thousand times more imperious than her own?

He felt something precious slipping from him. Was it his soul that was escaping him? He did not know, but he dared not look at his mother, lest he look at her with anger, and he dared not think of Helen, for fear of being ashamed. The crisis had come and had passed, and he had scarcely recognized it, but he knew vaguely and obscurely and deeply that he had missed something sublime that life had offered him on the evening of death.

As if across an infinite distance he heard his mother's voice speaking. It sounded to him like the mimical echoing voice of a malicious ghost.

"Your father liked England, but he liked it so to speak in the open. He used to say that in a country where duelling was prohibited and divorce accepted, drawing room manners were bound to be bad."

And he heard himself answering absurdly and peevishly, as if indeed there were any need to say any more.

"You actually thought then that Helen Chudd had bad manners?" and heard again the faint voice remonstrate: "Must you be so personal, my son?"

Then, suddenly when it was too late, he broke through the unreality, the subterfuge, the make-believe. He cried out and heard himself shouting and he knew that it would be no good:

"But this is a personal matter to me."

"Then all I can say is that it had better cease being so." She was invincible. He could not even frighten her.

He turned to her now in despair. Let her see then, that she had won.

She saw. His face was one of defeat and his eyes had a look of boyish suffering that implored her compassion.

"This is no moment for personal matters," she said more softly. And then with one of her beautiful gestures: "What of my personal need of you? My son, my son! Am I not giving you up for ever?" She held out her two long hands. Her face was working strangely. He saw her eyes blurr over. The sight of her tears was ugly and terrible. He went to her swiftly and knelt beside her. This time, he was certain that she was not acting.

He felt weak and ashamed. He knew that she had tyrannized over him finally and completely, but his compassion for her made him forgive her. He buried his face in her lap.

Late that night, his packing finished, his uniform laid out for the morrow, his last letters written and his instructions given, he sat by her bedside stroking her hand and watching her deathlike face on the pillow, yellow as wax, in the candlelight. And as he waited for her to go to sleep, he thought of Helen as a phenomenal apparition of beauty that had very nearly led him into disgrace and ruin. The spasmodic clutch of the thin fingers round his hand told

him this, and the disdainful arch of the high nose on the pillow seemed to mock his regrets. He was going to the war to fulfil the pride of that battered queenly head. The future was no more than this to him now, but he said to himself that this must be and would be enough.

IV

GUY DE BRISSAC was accomplished in difficult situations. His friends often sent him on delicate missions to their ladies. He was reputed, never to bungle anything. His tact was equal to his loyalty and when trusted with the responsibility of a cunning fib he could be counted upon to transmit the falsehood with perfect faithfulness and with a tender sincerity that could not so much as bruise the finest, most sensitive skin of feminine vanity.

He nevertheless approached the Hotel Meurice with far less than his usual self-confidence. His memory of Mrs. Chudd, met a dozen times at luncheons and dinners, was vivid enough to warn him that in her case, vanity would play no part, and that he had a bigger thing to deal with than the petulance of a lady's pique. He was not sure what she would do, and he liked always to know beforehand how people would behave. It caused him a feeling of acute discomfort to see any one give themselves away. It was possible that this haughty Englishwoman would shock him by some unnecessary display of emotion. He had admired her less than had St. Christe. Brissac liked above all things to be amused and he had not found her amusing. Her wit, if she had any, could not deal with the light in-

tricacies of the French tongue. Her beauty, he had of course appreciated, but it had left him cold. She had the finest shoulders in the world and for an Englishwoman her hands and feet were good. As for her colouring it was startling enough with its clear coppery skin and golden hair. Indeed it was too startling. To Jocelyn's enthusiasm he had replied that he liked soft shades and elusive lines and the beauty that escaped the vulgar eye; that he liked being charmed without knowing why and did not enjoy being knocked on the head by any dazzling bolt. His remarks had, he admitted to himself now, been even more critical than his thoughts. Jocelyn's infatuation had annoyed him and made him uncomfortable. It had gone too far. He had been obliged to give himself infinite pains to keep the two of them from becoming the talk of the town. If their names were not fatally coupled together, it was due to his own untiring efforts, nothing else. Jocelyn toward the end had behaved like a child. He had done all those things that are not permitted, and none, it appeared, that were. Instead of taking tea in her drawing-room from five to seven, he had spent whole days alone with her in the country, riding blandly out through the Meudon Wood, the two of them on a couple of horses, at ten o'clock in the morning and riding back again at seven.

To tell the truth, he, de Brissac, had not believed in her ignorance of conventions. He had suspected her of a deliberate plan, or at least of a desperate daring. Her husband was probably a brute who

had driven her crazy. Maybe he had turned her out of the house. Englishmen did these things. If so, the scene awaiting him would be nothing less than horrible.

He was told at the desk that she was in her apartment and that he could mount. Halfway up in the lift he realized with a heightening of his nervousness that the sleek gentleman behind the counter had murmured something about his being expected.

He knocked at the door, with a feeling of intense distaste, straining his ears as if about to surprise some painful secret sound, and it came; nothing secret or tragic in its audible joyous note for one who did not know of the trick that was being played upon her, but to him the culprit, more horrible in its melodious ring of exultant command, than any whimper or wail.

"Entrez!" came the strong ecstatic voice; and then as he opened the door, during the seconds he took to round the edge of the protecting screen, he heard her swift feet running toward him across the carpet, and the swish of silken clothes and the intake of hurried breath.

He thought: "In one second she will be in my arms." He rounded the obstruction. She was all but upon him, close, oh terribly close, yet not too close to stop dead, her hands outstretched, her body slanting forward. He held his breath, and holding it, he had time to see it all, her glorious blighted movement of welcome exposed there before his eyes, and the light on her face before it died out,

leaving in its place a stony astonishment that made him quail.

He felt the blood of shame on his face, and as he watched her miserably fascinated, he realized that he had committed an outrage. He had caught her waving her beautiful passion like a sunlit banner before him and he saw her draw together those luminous folds and wind herself in them as if in a shroud. He could not speak. He watched her blanch, and quiver. Her nostrils dilated. Her eyes stared, wider and deeper than eyes should be permitted to stare.

He believed in her now.

She said, dropping her arms to her sides, as if a spring in her shoulders had snapped and swung them down:

"Oh, I thought it was some one else." And then frankly with a lift of the head daring him to mock her, disdaining the confusion of subterfuge, she added abruptly: "I was expecting Monsieur de St. Christe, I sent him a note."

"Yes, I know. It was for that, that I came."

"He sent you?"

"No. I received the note. St. Christe has gone."

He had not intended any abrupt speech of this kind, certainly never in his worst nightmares had he imagined himself an assassin or a butcher, but her question had precipitated the bold lie, and the loathing of his task that had seized him in her presence

had urged him to make short work of the nasty business and get himself away.

She echoed the word "gone" and looked at him, and he felt under that look as if he were literally and visibly breaking out into a cold perspiration.

"Gone?"—"When?" she asked strangely.

"An hour ago," he blurted out with a sense of imbecile clumsiness.

"You mean that I'm too late?"

He shuddered for her, and manœuvred to shield her, from his own indelicate knowledge of what she was feeling.

"If you mean too late to see him? Yes."

She took it in silence, staring and he perceived all at once that she had ceased to see him. She simply forgot him there as he (at least so he felt) cringed before her. She might have been made of bronze, so motionless was she. Nothing about her moved, not a fold of her brown silk garments, not a finger in her still hands that pointed down to the floor. Her eyes remained wide open, the eyelids fixed. He found the sight unbearable and began:

"I had just been to see him off at the station and went back to attend to his things and I found your note. He had asked me to answer any letters. Things had been left in confusion; I thought it best to come. I dared to present myself. Pray accept my excuses. I understood at the desk downstairs that they had announced me."

"It is most kind of you," she murmured.

He moved toward the door, but she stopped him with a gesture that hooked him like a wriggling fish.

"Please give me the note, mine."

He stammered: "I — I am afraid I did not bring it with me."

"You read it and threw it away?" she asked quietly, oh very quietly.

"Yes, I read it and threw it away, or rather I should say, I left it there on his table."

"And came straight here?"

"And came straight here."

"It was most kind of you." she repeated. This time she allowed him to move two steps across the carpet. It was his own nervousness that stopped him.

"Jocelyn will be chagrined," he mumbled.

"Ah!" She lifted again her curious eyes. "You mean when he knows?"

"Yes, when he hears."

"You will be seeing him perhaps?"

"But surely; tomorrow."

"You join him?" she asked quietly.

"We are in the same cavalry regiment."

"I see." She pondered. And suddenly he saw his blunder. Did she suspect, he asked himself miserably. He had a sense of panic but she gave no sign. Her manner expressed nothing as she lifted her eyes again, but this time she scrutinized him coldly and he felt her gaze penetrate him icily.

"I see," she repeated. "You are in the same regiment, but he went ahead."

"A different company," he articulated, writhing as if pierced through by the icicle of her stare.

"I see," she said again and he was sure now that he caught a new glitter in her strange eyes. She remained silent, and he, half hypnotized by that profoundly pondering face, waited, and as he waited he realized that though she had not moved, her attitude and the hue of her attitude had changed. She seemed to him like some proud stricken animal of the wilds, some fleet and beautiful creature of the woods or prairies terrified and transfixed and helpless, waiting for the wound that would kill it. He saw now that this had been an illusion. He detected flashes, signs that suggested anger magnificently held; he felt that if she were actually a deer or some antlered creature, instead of a human being in brown draperies, he would be in danger of his life. She would roll him at her feet and trample on him with her beautiful hoofs and transfix him with her horns. Yet she had not moved and all his terror and foolish imagery was gathered from her eyes, that were blazing upon him, glittering, freezing.

Then all at once she let him go. Deliberately she turned away and over her shoulder said casually:

"It was most good of you to come. Tell him how sorry I was to miss him."

He gained the door. "I will certainly do so," and then idiotically as it seemed to him he added. "Jocelyn will be grateful for a message."

"Give him my very best wishes of course. May

you both — be spared to do the brave deeds that become you so well."

He could only mumble inarticulately as he got himself out, but beyond the closed door, his escape assured, he thought that he heard her laugh. He was not sure of that sound and knew as he ran to the lift that not for anything in the world would he have made sure. It was done. He was safe. He wanted to know nothing, nothing. The exigencies of friendship were great indeed.

Later, when he could think the matter over calmly, he was amazed at the impression she had made on him. He had thought her inexpressive, before, and she had expressed to him with a total absence of gesture, innumerable things. He had been very stupid. He had wondered whether she would know how to behave. The result had been that he himself had behaved like a clown. Weighing the pros and cons in his mind, he decided against giving Jocelyn a faithful account of the interview. It would be better for the latter not to know that she had detected the ruse.

PART THREE

I

JIMMY GOWER had no great opinion of himself but he loved his friends and his friends were many, too many some people thought. Women were constantly saying to him: "Oh, but you like everybody, Jimmy, and everybody likes you," and he had come to feel that this meant that he had no character. He admired character. He looked at stern old men wistfully and sighed at the admirable sight of young men fighting to get on in the world of public affaris.

"Men of character," he would ruminate trying to look wise as he lathered his face of a morning, "men of character have enemies. I'm afraid, old chap, that you're not much use." He would heave a sigh and run to answer the telephone and forget to be dismal at the sound of a sweet voice saying: "Jimmy dear, you must come. We can't get on without you."

Jimmy did not know whether he had more men friends than women friends or which he liked best, though of course they were vastly different, oh, undeniably different. He never deceived himself into thinking that they were similar, or that he felt the same about them. Women were women, the dears, and thank God they were. Women liked you to make love to them and thank God they did. Jimmy

was never tired of making love. He was always ready to begin again. On the other hand, he was always ready to retire from the field if he seemed to be spoiling another man's game. He never poached. He never disputed a prize. After all it didn't much matter to him. He would tell himself that he wasn't serious and other people were, and he had a profound respect for those others so different who took things hard and grew thin nursing a hopeless passion. When he saw what he solemnly termed the real thing, he would withdraw to a wistful distance and confide mournfully to some one that he had never been in love in his life, and the someone would say: "Jimmy you are an incorrigible liar."

He had never admitted to himself that this was true and that his favorite lament was a lie. It would have spoilt his disposition to have stopped to think about it, and so he kept it, way down, somewhere out of sight, and no one imagined that he, dear old Jimmy of the ready laugh and the untiring enthusiasm, had a secret.

Sometimes, on the very rare occasions when he was obliged to have a meal alone and when, consequently, he was gloomy, his secret would begin to take shape and threaten his peace of mind. He would reason with himself and say: "Look here, my dear fellow, you can't be in love. If you were you'd look it. You wouldn't sleep, you wouldn't eat. And as for eating, you know, there aren't many people who think as much, or more about it than you do, not in England anyhow." He would cock an

eyebrow and send his fancy across the channel to seat itself at a small table before a savory dish, and if this flight to the city of fine cookery did not succeed in laying the ghost, he would resume, in a more impatient tone, to his image:

"You look what you are, and you are what you look, a good-natured ass. There's no heart about you, and no romance. You've no damask cheek and no concealment like a worm in the bud ever ate into it, and besides, good God! if it were true now, then it must have been always true, oh for years and years, ever since you were a kid, and you needn't suppose that it's possible you've loved her all that time. It's impossible, therefore you see, it's not so."

This usually finished the shaking he gave himself and he would come out of it brisk and merry as ever. Monologues of the kind occurred three or four times a year, not more. One had to be alone for a longish time to begin to talk to oneself and he was never alone. It was perhaps for this reason that he had never found out that the truth of the matter lay in the fact William Chudd was his best friend and that his enormous enthusiasm for the man would suffer no breath of even secret disloyalty, for W. B. C. was his idol and the rock of his belief, and the anchor that kept him in England. "If it were not for W. B.," he had said, "I'd give up all this funny fagging I do for the Government and end my days eating in Paris." His fidelity to the big man had become a legend. He had told so many people for so many years that William Chudd was the greatest man in

England that when W. B. really did loom at last, enormous and solid behind the shifting scene of politics, the world of politics smiled at Jimmy and made use of him. He became a kind of intermediary and was to be seen running comically between the staid portals of Whitehall and Chudd's obscure den in the city. His sporting air, his somewhat startling waistcoats, his noticeable spats, usually white, and his refractory eyeglass came to stand for something unique. "An uncommonly useful chap," he was called. "Never out of sorts, and he's got the ear of the Mandarin." Of all of this, Jimmy was unaware. He had a poor opinion of himself, as has been said, but he loved his friends, and most of all he loved William Chudd. How was it possible for him to admit that he was in love with Chudd's wife? To have been brought to admit this to himself, he would have had to be alone with himself for a long time indeed, or to have been tremendously and terribly startled into sudden self knowledge.

Poor Jimmy Gower, he expected no such shock as he rushed through Paris on the 2nd of August at seven o'clock in the morning. Himself was the last thing he dreamt of thinking about. William Chudd had been at the bottom of his being sent to Rome on a piece of business of oppressive importance, and he was returning with a precious diplomacy and the feeling of having muddled things down there as a worm like himself was sure to do. He was racing along an empty boulevard behind a grim chauffeur who was driving as if the Germans were already at the

gates of Paris, and he was defying all the powers of Heaven to unravel what those Italians had meant from what they had said, when he saw Helen standing in the middle of the Boulevard St. Germain on one of those raised rounds of pavement where one hails tramcars. That she was the last person in the world whom he expected to see in Paris, on that day and at that uncannily early hour, explained to him very inadequately the horrid thumping that began under his ribs at the sight of her. Any one might have been anywhere and it would have seemed just mildly curious and in keeping with the general unnaturalness of things. It was the look on her face as he dashed past that arrested him and made him pound on the glass of the motor. Europe was sending shudders across half its surface, continents were crouching ready to leap from their anchorage. Nothing less than that look on that face could have stopped him, for Jimmy was aware of the horror of events and overpowered with the seriousness of his own fragment of responsibility. No face but the one face in the world, and that face touched with madness, could have stopped him. He realized this afterwards, but at this moment of the swerving round of the car as it turned and swept back to her, where she stood, staring up at the sky, so strangely, he realized only that there was something terribly wrong with Helen and that the ghastly hue of her face had flashed out and hurt him as if she had thrown a knife and hit him as he passed.

He drew alongside, opening the door of the lim-

ousine and was abreast of her before she could move. Something told him that if he had given her one instant's time she would have fled, but he was there on to her before she saw him and as she started back, glaring at him in a way that he would have termed "dotty" had he named it, he grabbed her arm,

"Good God, Helen, what's the matter?"

She struggled to free her arm, gasping as if for breath. Her face was damp like the face of a sick person in an agony of pain. Beads of perspiration glistened on her forehead and round her mouth. Her pallor had a greenish gleam.

"Let me go," she muttered; "what do you stop for? I was waiting"— She looked at him, knit her brows, seemed to try to think or rather seemed as if in spite of herself to recognize him: "It's you, Jimmy? I didn't know you — I mean — —"

"Come, get in."

"Get in — what for? Oh no, I don't want to get in."

"Come quick, I'm in a hurry."

"Why?" she mumured vaguely. "What for? Where are you going?"

"To the Embassy. I'll give you a lift."

He had by this time pulled her into the car and she had let herself be pulled heavily, in a dazed way as if not knowing what he was doing. Once there beside him, she let her head drop forward; it hung loosely downward. Her chin almost touched her breast. She might have fallen suddenly into a profound sleep, so limp had she become. The sight

of her made him feel ill. He realized that he was trembling. He was afraid. He thought to himself: "She has gone mad, and it's true, I have loved her all my life."

Was she mad, or ill? — What could he do? His brain told him nothing. His instinct said: "Rouse her."

"What are you doing in Paris, Helen?" he brought out in a loud matter of fact voice. She looked up heavily.

"What did you say?"

"I asked, what are you doing in Paris?"

She stared at him: "I'm waiting," she announced.

"To get back?"

"No, oh no."

"What for?"

"I don't know exactly — that is I'm waiting to find out what I'm waiting for."

His heart sank. His round fresh face grew red. His eyes began to smart, to fill; he had a gulping sensation.

"My poor Helen — poor dear!" He took her hand and stroked it. "There, don't bother to talk. It's all right. Don't look so worried. It's all right; you poor darling."

She stiffened suddenly.

"Ah, you think I'm ill?"

He nodded.

"You think I'm mad?"

He shuddered.

"Jimmy, look at me, look into my eyes." He did

so and saw with immense relief that although blood shot and shrivelled to half their size they were sane.

"I am not mad, nor ill. Jimmy, do you hear? It's not that."

He stammered: "I didn't say so."

"You thought so; you're not sure now. You believe I'm not responsible for what I'm doing. I won't let you get out of this car unless you swear to me that you'll not mention at the Embassy that you've seen me."

"But, Helen —"

"Swear it!"

"I can't leave you like this."

"Swear it."

"Will you wait then outside if I promise?"

She hesitated. At last she said: "Yes, I'll wait."

He was told in the Embassy that he could share a car to Bologne, but that the man who was going would not be ready for two hours. Would he come back at that time? No, the passenger trains were not running, or at least if they were, they were going backward.

Helen was waiting. She lay back in the corner of the motor, her eyes closed. He was grateful at finding her like that: anything was better than that terrible posture when her head had hung loose, drooping forward and down like a drunken woman. She opened her eyes as he joined her but did not move. It seemed to him now that she was merely exhausted. Her eyes were sunken. The corners of her mouth were drawn. Her nose seemed pinched.

She had the look of some one who is suffering from deadly cold.

"I have more than an hour to wait. Will you give me some breakfast?"

She signified her assent, scarcely audibly.

Watching her in silence, he wondered what she would do when they reached the hotel, but his fears on that point were groundless. She walked naturally enough, though slowly, dragging her feet one after the other through the hall to the lift, and he realized, as they passed worried women and haggard women in veils, that no tragedy or horror would seem strange to any one now and that the look on her face would pass unnoticed anywhere.

In her sitting-room he made a great to do about his breakfast. He would like coffee and two soft boiled eggs and some jam, if it wasn't too much trouble, and it seemed to him that she grew more natural and less afraid of him for his fussing. If that was what she needed he could do any amount of that. He began to chatter. He said that Italy was a long way off and that they had been held up interminably at the frontier. He said that it was hot in Rome and that the hotter it was the more people talked. He described a baby in the train who ate bananas, one after another, countless bananas. The recollection of those bananas disappearing into that baby was, he insisted, most awfully funny. It made him laugh to think of it. And he actually achieved the laugh. He knew then why he had been born in the guise of a court fool, it was so that now at this

moment, he would not frighten Helen. She would think him a harmless idiot and the presence of a harmless idiot was evidently what she needed.

The waiter brought in the breakfast tray and he pounced upon it with a roar of hunger, wondering how under Heaven he would choke any of it down. He flourished his napkin and poured out coffee with gurgles of delight. "Ass," he said to himself, "go ahead. Be it. It's your one chance."

He felt her behind him, hanging away, distractedly moving this way and that. He heard the swish of her skirts, and a little sound like a groan. It was as if some poor little wild animal were suffering there behind him. Looking into the mirror, he saw her staring at him, her eyes fixed, while her hands twisted together.

He took a gulp, wiped his moustache and burst out: "Jove, that's good!" He felt her come nearer shyly. He held his breath. She took off her hat and laid it on the chimney piece. He dared not look up. Then she said, standing before him, and her voice had a quivering sweetness:

"You're a dear soul, Jimmy."

Like a starving man, he attacked an egg, broke open a roll and applied to it a wealth of butter. He gave no sign of his immense joy at her tone. He was enormously and busily hungry.

"It's lucky you met me," she murmured.

"Yes, wasn't it?" he said brightly, fatuously grinning up at her. Her face had relaxed. She drooped wearily before him. He noticed that her

hair was matted and damp. It clung in wet tendrils to her temples. How glad he was now of his comic appearance, and what people termed his frolicking-puppy-features. Trusting to these and eyeing her closely he added mildly: "W.B. will worry; I can reassure him."

She started. He groaned inwardly.

"Reassure him?" she breathed with a strange tremor. Her eyes widened and fixed on something beyond him.

"Tell him I saw you and say you're alright."

"Oh God, now I've messed it," he wailed to himself, for he saw that once again she was quivering. A shudder, plainly visible to him, travelled down her as if some invisible power had seized her and were exerting a horrid vibrating pressure. He saw her try to master that shaking. He saw that she couldn't and then he saw in her eyes that she saw that he saw. He thought in one second more her teeth will begin to chatter, but with an effort that made her grimace strangely, twisting her mouth awry, she was still, then she took a step away and turned her back on him.

Miserably bound to his chair, he watched her lift her hands to her face, drop them again, and then she said coldly as if from a great distance:

"Yes, of course, certainly; you have seen me, and I'm alright."

"I'll tell him too, that you'll be home as soon as you can get across."

She whirled, facing him again.

"Coming home? No!" she cried out as if he had struck her, and then at the sight of his round flushed troubled face: "Oh, it doesn't matter what you say; say whatever you like. Only don't ever as long as you live tell any one how you found me, or what I was like. You wouldn't, you couldn't —" She was imploring him now —"You won't tell, will you, Jimmy; you'll say I looked well and happy. — No, you needn't say that. — I forgot — War is declared. No one need be happy now. Isn't it strange? It's so hard for me to think, I can't think clearly."

"You look most awfully fagged."

"Yes, that's it, I'm worn out. I've not slept for three nights. When you've not slept at all for three nights, you're bound to be tired, aren't you?"

"Of course. There's nothing so bad for one."

"Dear Jimmy, you see, I'm alright. I only want a little sleep."

"That's why you went out so early this morning I suppose."

"Yes, I couldn't sleep, so I got up at five. I'd been walking since then. I went to the Luxembourg gardens. They were locked, so I walked through the Latin quarter, and then I found myself in the Faubourg St. Germain. All the houses in the Faubourg St. Germain were closed. Every one is away. Or so they say — so it seemed. Perhaps they were there, who knows? The shutters were closed. How could one tell? It was so early. I had no one there, no one I wanted to see. I did not mean

to go. My feet took me. I hate the Faubourg, all those proud, old deceitful houses." Her voice quivered, trailed away. "I am so tired," she added in the tone of a child. "I believe I could sleep now." She smiled. "Seeing you eating your eggs has made me sleepy."

He suggested casually: "stretch out on the couch."

"I believe I will; do you mind?"

She dragged her feet across the floor, swaying, uncertainly, then dropped, crumpled up, clung to the couch, pulled herself further on to it and sank down with a long sigh, her eyes closed. When he rose a moment or two later and crossed to look at her, she was sound asleep.

And then Jimmy fell on his knees. He wasn't praying, or if he was, did not know it. He was just wishing, willing, trying, trying to help, trying to understand, trying to know what to do, feeling himself a worm, wondering what W. B. C. would have him to do. "If you were Bill Chudd, what would you have a man do for your wife, now here, like this?" he asked himself. Poor Jimmy, he didn't know; he could think of nothing to do. He had to take a bag to London. England would be at war in another twenty-four hours. The Italians had given him messages, which might or might not be sincere. He was bound to go. He was bound to leave her. He had promised her not to tell them at the Embassy of her presence. All he could do was to tell W. B. to send for her to come back. He

was of no use to any one. He was unable to help her. He could do nothing for her. He could only go away on tiptoe, leaving her asleep and remembering her smile, the most pitiful thing he had ever seen in all his life.

And he knew now that he couldn't any more get the best of his secret with monologues about food or anything else. There it was, staring at him, and William Chudd was his best friend.

II

PARIS on the third of August had seemed to Gower supernaturally calm. Its intense preoccupied quiet showed him a light-hearted nation, transformed by terrible knowledge. Alive grimly to its history, remembering with awful clarity the tragedy of other wars, Paris was terribly wise.

He found London in the throes of a savage and ignorant excitement. The placards of the afternoon papers were having it all their own way; Piccadilly was a chattering flood of fantastic conjecture; the crowd was aggressive and noisy. Under the stimulus of a tremendous and unreal danger the Anglo-Saxon felt himself a giant; Europe, he knew, was in upheaval, but his British Islands were solid, anchored firmly forever to the bottom of the sea and the sea belonged to him. He saw it dotted over with the hulls of his warships. He swelled out his chest, squared his shoulders and strode abroad, his fighting instinct exalted; his fingers itched for a gun; he demanded a part in the business. If his Government kept him out of it, he would consider himself cheated and disgraced. He thought of Belgium as a very plucky little country and France as a vague continent full of weaklings who would be no match for the Germans whom he hated. He was bound in honour to go over there and lend them a hand.

Gower delivered his precious bag to a haggard friend at the foreign Office and was told that the Chief Secretary would like to see him if he had anything very particular to say about the situation in Rome, but that if he had not, he the haggard friend who had not slept for five periods of twenty-four hours, advised him to go home and leave the minister alone. Gower was certain that nothing he could have to say was worth five minutes of the great man's time. His friend agreed with him and following him stiffly to the door, breathed in a languid tone that it was too late for any power on earth to do anything now. The Prime Minister had returned from Buckingham Palace half an hour ago. The thing was done. The sepulchral undertone had the sound of the still voice of Heaven.

Jimmy took himself out into the sunshine feeling a little as if he had had a blow in the stomach. He believed as much as any man in the street in those warships with their guns pointing across the seas; it did not for an instant occur to him that England, and his home and his mother and sisters and cousins and friends were in danger, but he knew Germany and he hated the Germans positively and personally, and he realized that not later than tomorrow morning he must join the army that would go out to kill them, and he felt himself very unfit to kill Germans. He was convinced that he wouldn't be any good as a soldier. His regiment had let him go five years before, because of a blow on the head at polo. His eye sight was bad, and he had a feeling that this was

particularly unfortunate, for surely one needed a good pair of eyes to shoot Germans. On the other hand no one would miss him at home. He was not a useful member of the community. His mother, when he said good-bye, would give him her weather-beaten cheek to kiss and go on with her game of bridge. His father would perhaps go so far as to settle his bills for him. Mentally calculating the sum of his debts he found that they made a considerable total but he felt fairly certain that under the circumstances his father would pay them, being convinced that this time was positively the last.

The phrase, " for the last time," seemed to him the refrain of his walk up Whitehall. He felt in a great hurry but did not take a taxi. The still small voice in the Foreign Office had paralyzed his power of decision.— There were a lot of things he would like to do for the last time, but the day was too short to hold them. He would leave them undone. He must find Chudd and then take the five o'clock train to the country. The Government had determined on war and W. B. had had something to do with that determination. He must find him and tell him that Helen was all right.

He would go to the club and telephone to W. B.'s office and have a drink. Some one there would tell him what to do to join up in a hurry.

He felt very tired. It was hot. The streets stewed and sent up strong odours. The crowds were as violent as ever. He moved through them wearily. " God help 'em," he muttered. Human-

ity swirled at street corners. Piccadilly Circus was a whirlpool where motor buses navigated like enraged walruses. An old woman in a shawl was selling flowers, just as she had always sold flowers in Piccadilly Circus. She knew nothing, observed nothing, feared nothing. He bought a red carnation for his buttonhole, for the last time!

Helen was anything but all right. Something dreadful had happened to her. It was none of his business to wonder what it was. She was alone in Paris, and war had cut off France from England as if the Channel had become an impassable torrent. He wondered if he had seen Helen for the last time. "We'll all lose each other in the beastly confusion," he said to himself. It seemed only too immediately true, for he could not find W. B. Half an hour in the suffocating enclosure of a telephone booth produced no result. There was no trace of Chudd anywhere. The only information he obtained was negative. No, he was not in his office; no, his secretary did not believe he was in Downing Street; no, the caretaker of the house in Mayfair had not seen him since eight o'clock the morning before, and did not know whether to expect him or not that night. He had disappeared like a wraith, a man of no substance who leaves no track behind him. The fact was disturbing. If a person of such height and such social bulk could be lost so completely, then the world had indeed become a horrid mystery.

Gower had no desire to join the groups of worried men in the bar or the smoking room. They were

talking with the animation of women at a tea party. It was extraordinary how many ideas they had. They were talking of Belgium and its invasion and the indomitable little Belgian army; they said that the war couldn't last more than three months because Germany would be ruined financially in that time; they believed that Russia would march straight to Berlin; they agreed solemnly that for the sake of Belgium they themselves must enter the war. They talked of " scraps of paper " and violated neutrality and the probable movement of the stock markets; they prophesied, they laid wagers, they blustered one to another. Jimmy had no ears for their words. He had heard the voice of the being who exists above all Gods and all worlds. Through the thin lips of a tired man at a desk it had spoken to him and had said: " Let there be death, let darkness swallow the earth." It sounded now in his head. He could not hear what the excited men in the bar were saying. They were like men gesticulating behind a thick pane of glass that shut in the sound of their voices. He left his drink undrunk, and started to go, but he did not know where to go to find Chudd.

He hesitated miserably in the doorway at the top of the front steps of the club, mopping his head and screwing up his eyes at the sunlight outside.

" Hello Jimmy, what's the matter? You look as if you were going to cry."

" Well, you don't." It was Stump Arkwright, recently become private secretary to the Prime Minister, cool, immaculate, imperturbable, in a silk hat

and grey gloves. He lit a cigarette, flicking an imaginary speck off his perfect coat, and turned a handsome blue eye on Jimmy.

"Come with me," he said blandly.

"Where?"

"To Downing street. The P. M. wants to see you."

"Don't be funny, little darling; I'm busy."

"Ass, I'm not funny, neither are you. He asked me to send or bring you."

"Why?"— Jimmy was being propelled down the steps and into the waiting car.

"It's about W. B. C.," said Arkwright once they were inside the car.

"What do you mean?"

"It appears that he has refused his support."

"I don't understand."

"The P. M. wants him in the Government. At a moment like this, you understand —"

"Of course, of course."

"Well, W. B. won't hear of it. We've all been after him. He just blinks at us and says nothing. Won't give his reasons."

"What's the matter?"

"That's what we want you to find out. The P. M. is willing to make concessions. If there's anything that Chudd doesn't like — it may be possible to — to arrange things."

"It can't be that, he wouldn't quibble."

"Ah, you imagine a different sort of thing? A private reason?"

Jimmy jumped. "Why do you say that?" he blurted out.

Arkwright smiled: "Why? Oh, for no reason at all I assure you. I was merely wondering; one hears things."

"Peggy's been giving lots of people tea lately," murmured Arkwright.

"Peggy isn't nasty, she couldn't be."

"No one suggests it of the dear child, but she has a flaire, she says his brain is ill."

"Humph."

"And — well you know it is singular, it is remarkable —"

"What the devil are you driving at? Singular? What's singular?"

"Helen's absence is singular, if you will be so ill tempered."

"Well, that's all rot; she's held up in Paris; I saw her; she's crossing as soon as she can get on a train."

"I see."

Jimmy grunted: "You're just like an old woman," he said peevishly. "Why don't you take care of the country and leave people's private affairs alone?"

"W. B. hasn't any private affairs now. We're going to war with Germany. He knows as well as any one that his support is invaluable. I confess I don't understand him and never did. What's he been working for all these years, if he throws over the whole thing now? Putting aside the question

of his obligation, it's at the same time his chance — his great opportunity. He could and would soon be running the country. No one else has such weight with Labour. He could bring them all in. He refuses. Naturally his refusal arouses suspicions. What's his game? He's a mine of information; what's he going to do with it, use it against us? Here we are. Come along in, the P. M. will give you his ideas."

"Oh, God!" groaned Jimmy.

He didn't want to go in at that door. The house that he knew so well, and where he lunched three days in the week, seemed to him a strange and forbidding house, and the man who was the father of one of his friends and the host of a hundred others and who had now sent for him on business of importance seemed to him a strange and sinister man. Nevertheless he went in, and a quarter of an hour later he came out. He did not look very different; often and often he had come out of that house, a round little figure with a rosy face and a carnation in his button hole and white spats on his shiny boots and with laughter bubbling out of him. The carnation and the white spats were still there, the face was still rosy and comically sweet, for no amount of worry could make it look anything else, but the laughter was gone, forever he would have told you. He was a forlorn little jester shorn of his jester's cap and his reason for being. Things were beyond him, things great and important and depressing had been told him, and they were beyond him.

He ordered Arkwright's car to take him to Lady Sidlington. If any one could help him to find W. B. she could. And he sat very still and plump and solemn against its cushions and he felt that he was crushed, but inside his crushed bruised person he held to his idea; he still believed in William Chudd.

Three solemn members of the Government had combined to crush him with the evidence of his friend's faithlessness to his country. The word treachery had not sounded in the stiff atmosphere, but its place had marked a definite hiatus in the smooth damning sentences.— Had W. B. absconded with the funds of the Bank of England the reproach cast upon him could not have been much greater.

"They take themselves too damn seriously," he muttered to himself. "God, a man's soul is his own I s'pose;" but his anger with those cold masters of diction who held the reins of the country in their accomplished fingers, was feeble. The pressure and weight of authority directed upon him at such close quarters had impressed him; and the great need of his country was heavy on his heart. He remembered the silent white roads of France with the dusty troops plodding along them in the sun. He saw those columns of men, coming up from every village and hamlet and city, to the frontier where the Germans were massing. Already perhaps the enemy had poured over. Already, France was invaded.

"We'll be too late," he groaned inwardly.

There was no time. Did no one realize how little time there was? Those three men, sitting still in

a room, weren't they going to do something?

He would miss his train to the country. Well then, he'd join up in the morning and go down afterwards. Impossible to put off joining another twenty-four hours. Suppose the Germans beat the French before he could get there.

The Prime Minister's wife had come out into the hall and had asked him about Helen.

"Why doesn't the wretched girl come home?" she had said.

He felt sure now that Helen would never come home, she wouldn't be able to. He believed definitely that he had seen her for the last time.

The world was black, black, black.

He loved Helen and W. B. and they had both abandoned him. Some tragic circumstance that was none of his business had cut him off from them forever. He had been told by the P. M. to go and bring W. B. to his senses. The idea was grotesque. If W. B. had gone mad, his madness would be colossal. He saw him in his mind's eye, pulling down his house with his hands and strewing the bricks over the green grass, and he heard him saying: "Helen has gone, so I'm pulling it down."

He started guiltily. The door of Peggy's house was open before him and she was in it, hatted and gloved.

"Oh," she said, "it's you? Come in." And she turned back beckoning him to follow.

III

SHE took him through the hall that was full of packing cases and parcels into the dining room. From behind the double doors of the library came the sound of voices and the clicking of typewriters.

"For the French Red Cross," she explained briefly. Her face was serious. She had on a limp linen dress and a small straw hat that came down over her head like a bowl. He noticed vaguely a difference in her. She was business-like and tired and strong. Closing the door after them she laid a bulging leather hand-bag with her gloves and parasol on the bare table and faced him.

They spoke then simultaneously:

"Have you seen, Helen?"

"Have you seen W. B.?"

And they both nodded assent, keeping still for a moment after, because neither wanted to begin a revelation that perhaps did not sufficiently concern the other to justify its telling. They weren't there to discuss the affairs of their friends for their own amusement. Their exchanged look conveyed each to the other an admonition: "Don't think that I'm going to talk to you unless it's really worth while."

"Have a cigarette," said Peggy, offering her case.

"I haven't much time."

"Neither have I."

"It's just this, then. I can't find W. B. Do you know where he is?"

"What do you want him for?"

"The P. M. has given me a message for him."

"I see." She leaned against the dining-room table, her hands on it behind her, her eyes in a level concentrated gaze turned to the window. Her attractive appearance seemed a mistake. She had the manner of a severe school-mistress.

"Well," she said deliberately after thinking a moment, "I can tell you where to find him, but," and she nipped off his sigh of relief with a frown, "I don't know whether I will or not."

"And why on earth not? Isn't he? — Ain't I? Aren't we friends for Heaven's sake?"

"Don't get fussed, Jimmy. Of course you are his friend, but perhaps that's just the reason — I mean if he wanted to see you, he would have left word, wouldn't he?"

"You mean he is deliberately avoiding me?"

"I don't know; it is possible, he didn't say so; he didn't say anything about you."

She gave it to him straight like a challenge.

He flushed. She seemed to him antagonistic and somehow disagreeable.

"Well, why should he?" To this she answered nothing, so he added irritably: "What the devil did he say?"

"Ah, that I can't tell you."

He turned away then to hide his annoyance. He was jealous: why should W. B. have confided in her? He kept his back to her and lowered his head between his shoulders. The idea that perhaps he would be forced to go off to the war without seeing W. B., and never perhaps see him again, and never perhaps come back, filled him with a great enveloping hurting fear. He was conscious of a sense of enormous loss, as if a huge and fatal theft had been perpetrated upon him. He had known for some time, all that day anyhow, that he would go out and get killed, but he had not known what it meant. Now he knew. This was one of the things it meant. He was aware now that he would leave them forever, W. B. and Helen. Never again would he look at their faces, or feel the warm good comfort of their companionship. He would be alone; he would be done in. He would cease to be. He would not even remember. If only he could see W. B. just once more, he felt that it would all be bearable. This was childlike, he knew, but he felt like a child, and a wronged child who had been cheated, betrayed, and who had been left alone in the dark. He was afraid. Ah, how dark it was, the sunny dreary square beyond the window, with the green trees behind the black iron railing. How many times he had driven into that square with W. B. to pick up Helen, and take her down to the country. She used to wave from the window and W. B. would look up and smile and stand waiting to hand her into the car, and then they would carry her off the two of them. W. B.

would drive with Helen beside him and he, Jimmy, behind. They had tolerated him always. Always they had been kind to him and he had been happy, because they were happy. Now they were unhappy and they had no use for him; he had lost them, W. B. had thrown him over.

He was too disturbed to hide his feelings.

"But I want to see him," he blurted out. I'm joining up tomorrow; I can't go without seeing W. B.

He felt Peggy's arm slip through his own.

"Dear Jimmy, I'm so glad, and I'm so sorry." Her voice was sweet now and kind. "Come, sit down. I'll tell you what I can, and you tell me; I swore to W. B. that I would put no one on his track. It's no use going to him with a message from the P. M. He knows all that; it's no good interfering with him now; we can't do anything any of us, he is determined.

"Determined to do what?"

"Determined to give it all up."

"But he can't, not now. He can't just chuck everything and he won't, I don't believe it, he's not a coward."

"No." Peggy took off her hat and leaned her head in her hands. She had drawn up a chair to the table and faced Jimmy across a corner of it. "No," she repeated, "he'll go out to France and get killed."

"But he's not a soldier."

"He'll become one."

"Good God! I don't understand. He's no

right to do it. The Government needs him."

Peggy sniffed: "Government!" and twirled her fingers, but her face was serious.

"Well, that's all very well, but if no one stays by the Government —"

She eyed him wisely: "They've been getting at you," she announced, "I know them."

"I admit —" but she interrupted him.

"They're stupid. Of course it's his duty to help them. They needn't think we don't understand; W. B. understands perfectly, but he's not going to do it, he can't, he doesn't care. He can't care; he — he is like a dead man walking round watching. His eyes — his eyes —" Her voice became a whisper; then stopped; her mouth twisted. Gower watching her with appalled attention felt that he must dash from the house, if she cried. Peggy in tears was just the final stroke that his nerves could not stand. He would rather know nothing, and go away forever and get himself done in as quickly as possible. But she did not cry; she was made of fine hard stuff and her face stiffened.

He waited a moment, then, timidly, afraid of that white little face beginning again to twist and quiver, he asked:

"Where did you see him?"

"Here. He came here two days ago, three days after she left. She had been here before; he had guessed that. He asked me if she had looked happy: I told him the truth."

"Which was?"

"That she was transfigured."

"Then God help them both, for she's not happy now."

She seemed not to hear him. "I never saw anything like her. She frightened me. Her face was a blaze of light. She went off with her head up, as if she were going to fly, to soar straight to Heaven. It takes us all a little like that, but with her it was more so than with any one I'd ever seen. It was terribly beautiful."

"What was terribly beautiful?"

"Her joy, her passion, visible passionate joy. It showed, so that I hated to let her go out in the street, it seemed indecent to show her, to the street. I would have kept her back if I could, but what could I do? Nothing I could have said would have had any effect. She was invulnerable, supernatural; I wanted to shout at her that he wasn't worth it, that he was worth nothing."

"Who? Worth what? Who?"

"Jocelyn de St. Christe, worth her love."

"Do you mean?" whispered Jimmy faintly; "do you mean?" He felt deathly ill.

"Yes, I do, yes, yes, it's incredible, it's monstrous, but that's how it takes us. She couldn't fight it; she tried, I saw her. She gave him up, she stuck to William, and then, at the first breath of war, at the first threat, she broke loose to go to him. Don't you see? Don't you see?"

Jimmy huddled in his chair white as a sheet, his plump arms on the table, his blue eyes staring, saw

indeed; he saw so much that he wanted to die.

"And William knows?" he asked dully, at last.

"Yes, he knows. She must have told him; she would you know. She is brutally honest. He knew that she had meant to go for good. He came to leave a message, in case she came back to England. He was like a great heavy clown made in white chalk and his eyes were the strangest things in Heaven and Earth. He said: 'Don't look at me, Peggy; it might make you laugh or it might make you cry. Don't look; just listen.' Then he left his message and went away. He was like a giant clown with a face of white chalk and tragic eyes. It's only once in a hundred years that a man cares for a woman as much as he cared for Helen. Why didn't Helen understand?"

"God forgive her; she's paying for it now."

"What do you mean?"

"She was ghastly."

Peggy shook her head: "That's nothing. St. Christe has gone off to the war. That's nothing."

"I don't know; it seemed as if something horrid had happened to her, something humiliating, shameful. I may be wrong; I thought she was crazy, insane, I mean. She hung her head as if she had been whipped, cuffed, like a dog, or something worse. I don't know what I'm saying; I'm sorry, it's not my business, is it? There is nothing to do, is there?"

"No, nothing, unless — somehow one got her home, unless some miracle happened before he went."

"Have you wired?"

"Yes, three times; no answer."

"Telegrams are all held up."

"I know."

"Trains aren't running."

"I suppose not."

"And if she came, would he?"

"How could he?"

They stared at it, in silence.

And at last, Jimmy got up, very wearily, and took up his hat and stick and turned to the door. The carnation in his buttonhole was crumpled, but not more crumpled than he himself.

"I would have accepted to burn in hell for W. B.," he said solemnly and his mild blue eyes fixed on Lady Sidlington had the look of a child whose heart has been broken. She nodded back at him gravely.

"Perhaps William will want to see you after all," she said. "I'd stay in town tonight, if I were you." She went with him to the door.

He had dined alone at his club when the message came. He was asked by Lady Sidlington to call that evening at a boarding house in Bloomsbury, No. 32, Tottenham Court Road.

He was at the house by nine o'clock. A respectable person told him to go to the top up two flights and knock at the door opposite the stairs. It occurred to him while he climbed the narrow stair that he had never been in such a house before. It conveyed nothing to him. The stairs went up between

dark blank walls. On each landing was a gas jet turned low. People presumably lived there, a kind of people that he did not know. He thought: "If one wanted to be lost, no one could find one here. There are thousands of houses just like this. If one went in to any one of these, one would find the same steep stairs covered with the same oilcloth, the same dark enclosing walls, the same pale jets of gas. One could spend one's life knocking at doors, one after another all alike."

He felt the uncomfortable thumping of his heart as he stopped on the top landing. He did not really believe that W. B. was there under that dismal roof. He was walking in his sleep; he would wake up in a moment and find himself at home, in the country, in bed, with his valet telling him firm things about getting up. His hand was on the door knob of a blank inimical door, beyond which was some dread revelation, or nothing. He knocked with the knuckles of his other hand, holding his ear close to the door. No sound came from within. He listened, his hand of itself turned the door knob, and he entered the room. It was large and dark and silent. It reminded him of a garret or box room, but there was a shaded lamp on a table, and beside the table William Chudd was seated.

IV

THE great bulk did not stir at the opening of the door. One would have believed it incapable of movement. Its mass was inanimate; it seemed scarce, human and terribly heavy, and its heaviness betrayed no inner power that could conceivably summon it to move. So, a great heap of wreckage, so, a giant lump of stuff or a waterlogged bale might appear after sinking through a great depth of water, so it would settle at the bottom, and be anchored there forever by its own inertion, its invincible weight. No tides would move it ever; no strange creatures swimming about it, would work upon it any change. It was there to stay because it was a dead enormous weight, and the resistance of its lifelessness was greater than the energy of life. Of such an aspect was the bulk in the cavernous room.

Gower overwhelmed by this impression said to himself. "He is dead," but a voice thin as a string, that seemed to draw itself out from the mass in the armchair said, as if in answer:

"I'm not dead, Jimmy. Don't look so frightened."

Gower approached the figure. He saw then in the light of the solitary lamp the white face and the strange eyes that Peggy had told him about. The

eyes were very small. They might have been points burnt into that white surface leaving a red spark to linger in each one, and those tiny glaring sparks were the only living things in the mass of the man. The thin voice that made the soft whirring sound like the singing of a taut cord, seemed not to belong to the man at all. It might have come from a ghost, or a practical joker behind a curtain.

"Sit down," it whirred: "I've one or two things to ask you and one or two things to say. You will excuse my not getting up. I can't. I am too fat, I shall not get up until tomorrow morning and then I shall never sit down again."

It did not occur to Jimmy until afterwards, walking the hot night streets in a fever of misery, that the words William Chudd uttered during that hour were strange. It was as if the impression of his complete annihilation had been so immense and indisputable that anything he might say was perforce logical and reasonable. If one were listening to a man talking from the other side of the grave one would not be surprised if he talked differently from men at the club. Ghosts have, presumably, a language of their own. Condemned men in cells are allowed differences of tone and phrase. Who knows what may have been the utterances of victims nearing the end of their agony on the rack. Jimmy knew nothing of these things. Neither history, nor mediumistic séances, furnished his mind with images, nor did he think of Chudd as a man about to die; nevertheless he was not surprised at the words that

came from behind that deathly mask. The desolation of a human being loomed enormously before him and commanded his reverent and minute attention. He had no will left with which to analyse and no heart with which to lament. His faculties were paralyzed by the knowledge of what was before him; he could only listen.

"I am too fat for anything but butcher's meat," the voice went on. "Helen is not a cannibal, Helen is a lady. If she were nothing more than that, that in itself would be enough to explain. The only thing that is not explicable is why she waited so long, and why she ever came.

"Olympus is a long way from the swamp in which monsters wallow. What made her descend? She floated down. I did not drag her. How could I have done so, had I dared attempt it. My paw had not a great enough reach to attain her, up there. Besides, I saw her coming, I watched her, floating, sinking down on the wings of the morning, golden in the light of Heaven, I, wallowing in my swamp, looked up and saw her. That was long ago, oh very long ago, I would put it as a few æons before the Mycenaean Age. And as she only stayed a little while, ten years, or ten days, it must have been a long time ago, that she went away, but on that point I am not very clear. I do not remember her actual going, I did not see her go. She slipped away when I was asleep, sunk deep in disgusting sleep and I only knew that she was gone when I — found she was gone."

The voice stopped. A sound like a shudder of

wind followed its high small chant. A sigh of unutterable weariness breathed up from the wide chest and was lost in the still suffocating gloom of the room, then the voice began again, its falsetto notes were spun smoothly from the colourless, motionless lips.

"In the meantime Europe was moving toward war. One observed upon the face of Europe spots, like fever sores, angry chafed places. One observed the growing restlessness of nations. The sore places seemed infected, the fever spread, the pulse grew rapid, one could feel its heightened beating. A day came when the pulse of Europe throbbing under your hand, leaped like a mad thing. Some of us felt it, some of us watched, knowing what was brewing beyond the horizon. We saw the nations crouching, eyeing one another ready to spring. Then a voice over there said the word war, and they sprang. They were at each other's throats. Presumably, they do not know what it means, this death grapple. It is possible that each one believes he will emerge intact from the struggle. They do not know how difficult it will be to let go.

"Life as we have heretofore understood it, is at an end forever. The chief business of life will from now on be the business of extermination. It is good to understand that at the beginning and make one's preparations. I have made mine; my life has ceased, I am prepared to lend a hand in this matter of extermination, and this brings me to certain practical questions, in which I wish to trust you with

my confidence. You are my friend, you are honest, I used to love you, and if I cannot remember quite what that means it is because it was so long ago that I ceased to be a human being. I am a private in His Majesty's army, nothing more. I will not tell you the name of the regiment I belong to, and I ask you not to endeavour to find out. All business and government affairs in which I was concerned, I have put aside. Everything is in order, even to the disposal of my personal belongings. There remain certain things that belonged to Helen. There is the house Red Gables. Lewis & Osborne are charged to keep it open and in repair, and to keep up the garden in so far as that is possible. Her jewels are at Barclay's Bank, the Westminster Branch. Her two hunters were taken by the Remount people, the chestnut hack is at Tattersalls. The Renaud limousine is in her garage in the country. In regard to her banking arrangements, no special changes had to be made. Her income will fluctuate less than most people's, but, as I remember, she had never any definite idea as to its extent or limitations. I have therefore asked her solicitor to keep her informed and advised each month as to the amount available for spending. She never liked making out cheques, and in fact could not seem to grasp the use of stubs in a cheques book; however, I — I presume she will manage somehow."

His voice cracked. It stopped in a kind of squeak. He remained silent a moment and the lids fell over his small burning eyes. When he spoke again it was

in a different tone, scarcely louder than a whisper and his words were blurred, running one into the other so that it was difficult to understand what he said.

"The most superb women have often something very childish about them. Helen could not do sums; she used to bite her fingers; the knuckles of the forefinger of her left hand until it bled, and sometimes she would cry. You would not believe that she could cry like a little girl and want to have her hair stroked and be soothed, would you? Just because arithmetic was so beastly, and her accounts came out wrong? I have seen her like that. I have stroked her hair, she let me, I it was, who soothed her. She ran to me when she was in trouble with those figures. Why did I not understand then in those moments that she was just a child? Her appearance deceived me; she looked a Goddess. Her beauty always bewildered me. If I had been blind, I would have known how to make her happy. Whenever I was away from her I made plans and thought over my mistakes and worked out new ways of joy for her. I used to lay deep schemes to make her laugh, but when I came back into her presence, I was afraid to try. She was too beautiful, I lost confidence in myself, I hung before her dumb, quaking, stupid, afraid to move a finger lest she run away and hide from me.

One day she fainted at the sight of me coming towards her. That was the day when I knew — about the war and about her going. Both inevit-

able — It is terrible to know, and to wait, I suppose. I hoped. It seems to me now that I was struggling all that time. I remember hours of exhaustion, such weariness as is unknown to most men, exhaustion produced by the struggling of my hope that found it so hard to die. That hope kept me breathing, praying, watching, wanting, waiting."

He paused, then went on:

"When she was here, I did not understand her; now that she is dead, I understand. Her heart was just a child's heart, a little, holy, ardent thing throbbing pitifully in a queenly bosom. Poor little heart, it needed beauty and tenderness, and it had in me a monster of ugliness and clumsiness. How could a hippopotamus convey tenderness? Conceive of the grotesque gesture meant to convey the finest and most frail of all the emotions of the soul; suppose the ugly beast wanted to smile, even to smile. The result would be appalling and the lift of its paw that willed to caress would hideously crush.

"When I think of the inrush of joy that the sight of her gave me, how through my eyes that beheld her I seemed to penetrate to the heart of all lovely mystery, I realise how my presence must have blocked the way of her soul, I, I, enormous and fat, shut her in and hid the romantic horizon where the fairies of love and high fancy dance and beckon and throw kisses to the yearning hearts of mortals. I was her jailor, her giant, her curse.

"Once she was ill, then in her weakness she clung to me. In those days, my arms cradled her. She

would ask to be carried, and I would walk with her fevered head on my shoulder; then, with her eyes closed, she drew comfort from my strength, and trusting it, would fall asleep, and I would be allowed to watch her as she slept.

"Now that she is gone I remember her weakness and I see that when she was most strong, even then she was weak.

"Now that she is dead I understand. Beauty is an illusion, but I loved her beyond and in spite of her beauty. Life is a curious dream, bounded by the mirage of the world, but all about it and under it and beyond it, is death. Death is the only reality, and sorrow is its voice in the world. We struggle to be happy and we fight to live, knowing that life leads to death and that we are born so that we may know what it means to die.

"I took a more active part in the gigantic farce than most men. I dealt in large pretences and manipulated the scenery and puppets on a stage that was quaking. Now that is finished, for me there remains the only reality, death. They, the puppets, wanted to keep me behind the scenes. They said that they wanted my advice about Germany, Russia, the Balkans, about harvests, mines and oil wells; of what good would my opinion be now, when it is all summed up in the word "destruction?" It is better for me to follow the lead of death and go out and kill.

"Tomorrow the army owns me; I shall go with it, to kill the Germans who are certainly those who should be exterminated if any one else is to survive,

and if children are ever to be born to joy in the world. For humanity is destined to pursue its illusions through the centuries, and it is perhaps worth while trying to clear the scene of brutes and cowards. Tomorrow, the army owns me and takes me away from the places that I used to know and where I am known as a first-rate scene-shifter.

"Ah yes, I remember, it was for that I asked you to come." His eyelids lifted. The burnt spots stared out of the wide white face, the massive forehead, with its finely modelled temples, caught the full light of the lamp, and the light seemed to reveal under that shining surface, the wonderful workmanship of some power that had formed a great brain: William Chudd's forehead dominated his face, at last, for the cheeks were sunken, and the fullness of it had perceptibly withered.

"People may ask for me," he said. "Some may try to find me. I wish you to defeat them in their efforts. It is necessary that I be left alone. Make it clear that no power on earth can bring me back to live among them. Convince them of the finality of the thing. Convey to them the sense of what I am at this moment conveying to you and what I see reflected in your face, my annihilation, my extinction. Tell those that ask out of kindness that the only kindness they can do me, is to behave as if I were dead.

"Death, you see, is the one complete solution for such problems as mine. Death with nothing beyond it. Oblivion soaking me up, not only my conscious-

ness, but also the memory of me in the minds of men. Such shall be and must be my freedom. And if at any time, for some time, who knows, she may come back to her home, if Helen should come to you and ask, tell her what I tell you now. Tell her that it is her freedom and my own that I want and will obtain, freedom from all clinging clutch of memory and from all horrors of the imagination. You see I must consider her as dead. Anything else would be too terrible. If it is an illusion that I allow myself, it is only in anticipating the day when it will be literally true. She will die, some day. I had thought to be with her until then and watch the kind lines of time on her face. I imagined that she would grow more and more lovely as she grew old. I believed that she would be beside me, white haired, erect and lovely, and that we would leave the earth together in one bound, but now she is gone. The end is now, and I am as lonely as if I were the only human being left on the earth. Loneliness is another reality. Loneliness — we are all afraid of it, I am afraid of it."

His voice faltered; it seemed to scrape against an obstruction in his throat. He spoke again, more loudly and with difficulty.

"If in the meantime it is actual legal freedom she wants, tell her that it will soon be hers. The War Office will inform her on the day that this monstrous carcass no longer bulges upon the surface of the earth. That is all, I think. I do not seem to have said to you what I meant to say. There were things,

I cannot remember what they were. I told you about Helen's money matters, did I not? — Yes, I told you, and how she could not look after them. Child, little child, wild thing; it was for her I did all the things that I can't remember. They called it serving one's country; I did it for her, and I was wrong. It did not make me more pleasant in her eyes; I remained as fat as ever, I am so fat I cannot move. Pounds and pounds of flesh, monstrous flesh, ugly. Ugliness and loneliness, these two things I keep by me, the rest is gone. Loneliness!" The voice stopped, the lips closed, the pale eyelids dropped and with the completion of that infinitesimal ripple of movement the man was still.

Jimmy Gower was afraid to speak. And what indeed had he to say? It was clear that no word of his could penetrate the fastness of that immobility. He waited in the suffocating gloom of the room until he could bear it no longer. Tiptoeing to the door, he looked back at the great pale head with its strange dead mask, then he went out, leaving William Chudd alone, like some giant image of extinct humanity presiding over eternal solitude.

V

DURING the days that followed, when first the men in khaki marched through London to the strains of Tipperary, camped in Hyde Park and drilled in Regents Park, and said good-bye in thousands to white faced women at Victoria station; in those days when Kitchener's army rose up out of the smoking cities and the smiling fields of England and crowds of men hung outside recruiting offices, the fate of Lady Peggy hung in the balance. For Lady Peggy was determined to take part in the war and had set her lovely face toward France.

Her appearance and her record were against her, her millions and her persuasive tongue were for her; oh, very much so. She was, so they said at the War Office and at Devonshire House, wagging their wise old heads, far too pretty in that uniform, to be turned loose upon an army, French or English. On the other hand, she wanted to give! there you were. What she was prepared to give made them lift their hands. The hands remained lifted; no one knew whether they would come down in a sign of acceptance and benediction, or whether after all Mrs. Grundy would work the strings that controlled them and produce a gesture of dismissal. Perceiving Mrs. Grundy, in the background and annoyed with her, as she had thought she would never have occas-

ion to be, Peggy began to talk. She talked in English and she talked in French. Strange potent words fell from her lips; technical terms, in all their magic played upon the hearing of stern officials. Fracture beds, extensions, water pillows, sterilizing drums, X-ray apparatus, operating tables, ether masques, hypodermic needles, the principles of asepsis, she was lost in none of these things and dealt in dozens, and in prices with a liberal exactness. The principles of asepsis, was one of her favourite phrases. She made of it the text of her sermon, and shuddered at the horrid vision of infected wounds that might be cleansed were she allowed to cross that churning channel. To ensure perfect asepsis, and fine surgery, and that close to the line of battle, to provide the most perfect surgical equipment in the smallest possible compass, easily transported, magically light, this was her formula. It would ring out bravely, then her voice would drop; " And, " she would add, " to save the lives of those heroes, our tommies or the French poilus, to bring them comfort and peace and the hope of life, that is what I would do. How can you refuse me? A small effort, naturally it must seem so to you, but if out of the thousand, only a hundred come to us and are saved, will it not be worth while? How dare you say no to me? What right," and she would smile, " has your horrid red tape to interfere with saving men? "

How indeed could they refuse? For themselves yes, the War Office was stubborn, it wanted no vol-

untary effort; its medical corps was fully competent, but for France, they would allow the unit to be formed. The gesture was one of benediction and the French authorities smiled on Peggy, thanking her in terms that filled her eyes with tears.

"We've the worst manners in the world," she sighed when the final verdict was given. "You'd think the only gentlemen in London were the French." She did not realize that she was an object of fear to those old Anglo-Saxons, nor would she believe it, even when Mary Bridge told her to tuck her curls under her cap.

Lady Sidlington saw no connection between tango parties and a field ambulance. It did not occur to her that because she had once patronized the former, she could not undertake the latter. Making bandages came easily to her fingers. If she could not hunt five days a week, she could work seven, and if no chauffeurs were forthcoming, she would drive herself, in Belgium, France, or along the road to Berlin; the chauffeurs were forthcoming quickly enough, however.

Doctors and surgeons, and nurses thronged the big house in Eaton Square and Peggy in dark blue serge with no curls showing under her veil, or perhaps just one over her ear, received them sweetly, her lips stained from much chewing of a blue pencil. She greeted them all with her loveliest smile topped by just the smallest most business-like frown, and said:

"It is really too sweet of you to help us. Please talk to Miss Bridge about details; you'll find her in the library."

And Mary Bridge with professional grimness sorted them out. A stenographer at her elbow and a bell under her hand, and a boy scout at the library door, she interviewed, dictated, telephoned. She had insisted that Peggy should leave her alone and never enter the room unless she rang the bell three times.

"You're a darling, Peggy, but you've no practical sense, and if you want me to organize the thing you mustn't bother me. Beside you'll have quite enough to do getting round all the old men, so just leave me alone unless I send for you." And Peggy obeyed, she went forth, she smiled, she persuaded, she melted hearts of stone. Obedient to the library bell she would appear in the door and listen.

"Peggy, the transport people are being very nasty. They object to half of all our staff; you'll have to go and see a Colonel named Stratham. Explain to him that the motors aren't touring cars, or only one of them, and that the operating tables aren't sofas and that we're not taking one thing more than absolutely necessary."

Peggy would go, the colonel would begin by being cross, and end by being gallant and remain an ardent friend.

Stump Arkwright began talking of Peggy's army and Peggy's war. Bond Street stared sympathetically at the red crosses on the doors of her limousine

and many a man in khaki smiled at the sweet face in the blue veil behind the glass window. Peggy was foolish, and Peggy was wise.

She knew her limitations and sat meekly at the feet of her surgeons, and let her matron discard almost all her pet things and listened with angelic patience to Mary scolding about prices.

"Peggy, these Turkish towels are twice the price of the others."

"But, dear, they're nicer, they're pretty, they have a blue stripe."

"Who wants bath towels to be pretty? They're no better in quality; you can't have them. It's mad extravagance."

"Very well, dear," and Peggy would acquiesce wistfully. In the bottom of her heart she had hoped everything might be pretty, but she knew she was foolish.

Sometimes when Mary did not want her, she would go shopping. The result was as a rule considered lamentable. She could not resist blue enamel, and jugs and basins of minute size, but of that heavenly blue, began to arrive in hundreds.

"They are not suitable, we must send them back."

"But, Mary, the enamel's just as good even if it is blue."

"I'm not objecting to the colour, darling, it's the size."

"Oh, are they so small?"

"Absurdly. Think of scrubbing a whole man, in that much water."

"I didn't think of that. I'm so sorry."

"I know you didn't; you never scrubbed a soldier."

"But the people at Harrods will be so disappointed if I send them back."

Peggy's brow was puckered; then it lightened.

"I'll give them to the children's hospital, may I?"

"You dear, but of course you may."

Peggy's friends were amazed at her. A feeling of awe took possession of her many admirers.

"By Jove, she's an angel, she's a saint. Fancy her going out there to rough it! Have you seen her boots? Field boots, old man, the real thing, and on those feet, and a camp bed, X pattern. She says she's going to live in a tent."

In the matter of personal wardrobe, Peggy was certainly reasonable. "We must have warm underclothes, they say: flannel combinations, ugh, and weary dark blue pyjamas and high woollen boots, so that if we're called suddenly in the night, we'll be decent." But her greatest proof of good faith was shown in the fact that she put away the dear little red cross in rubies that the very nicest man in the world had given her, and pinned her collar with the regulation brooch, the result of all of which was that Mary Bridge a week after the ceremony of benediction announced that the unit was ready to start as soon as the War Office gave the word. It consisted of two surgeons, one medical man, three dressers and twelve fully trained nurses, tons of material, four ambulances, two motor lorries, and one touring car.

Portable huts or tents were to be sent on demand, if no building were found to house them.

It was at this point in the proceedings that old Brandon turned up from the country and begged her ladyship for a moment alone.

"Mrs. Chudd is at home, your ladyship. I've been hoping you'd come, but when I saw how things were turning out, I made up my mind to let you know. It's not my place I know, and Mrs. Chudd would be very angry if she knew, but I felt it my duty, Mr. Chudd being away at the war and there being no one but me to look after her now."

"You were quite right, Brandon. When did she get back?"

"A week ago, my Lady. She arrived in a taxi, in the middle of the night with all her bags round her and her face as white as a sheet. She said she had found the home in Curzon Street closed, not even a caretaker there and so she had motored down, straight away that evening. She was in a very strange state, my Lady, so cold, we couldn't get her warm and that on an August evening with the air as soft and not a breath of wind. We put her to bed and gave her a drink of hot milk. She wouldn't eat anything whatever, not so much as an egg, and she's been like that ever since."

"Cold, you mean ill?"

"No, not ill, at least not exactly, but she won't eat and she won't speak, scarcely a word all the day; she just sits in the library, with her hands crossed, not even a book in them. Whenever we go in, any

of us, the maids or myself, we find her like that sitting and looking at nothing. She doesn't so much as notice us coming and going. All day she sits in the house, it's not natural, she was always so active, my lady, on a horse, or on the river, or motoring somewhere, or with people about. Not a living soul has been near her, except one day Mr. Gower came, I should say Captain, and since then she's been even worse, my Lady. She walks up and down for hours in the room, and she's given orders to admit no one. I don't know as one ought to observe such orders, my Lady, seeing as how she can't be quite herself."

"No, Brandon, one shouldn't. I'll motor down tomorrow."

"Thank you, my Lady." The old man hesitated: "You'll perhaps not say that it was me as told you, my Lady. I've been with Mrs. Chudd for ten years and I wouldn't like to leave her now with the war on, and she all alone."

"You can trust me, Brandon."

"You'll find her very strange, my Lady. Sometimes she quite frightens one. It's a great pity Mr. Chudd should have gone off to the war so sudden."

Lady Sidlington was not sentimental. She hated people who sat about mooning over things that were finished and settled. William Chudd had gone to the army and Helen had come home too late to see him. She had no sympathy with Helen. When one took the reins in one's hands one was supposed to know how to drive. Helen had had her hour, she had been to see her lover, and her lover like every

other man in the world had gone to the war. She was no more unfortunate than hundreds of other people. All the women she knew were living on the rack of suspense. Every one loved some one out there. They didn't whine about it; they kept their fears to themselves. If they had good news they shared it, if they had bad news they hid themselves from sight; if they had no news at all, they kept a stiff upper lip. Lady Sidlington admired a stiff upper lip, more than most things. And she admired William Chudd more than most men. She regarded his resignation from public life as an admirable act of extreme simplicity. The war fever had seized her and had diminished for her the sense of personal issues. She no longer saw William's chalk white face and tragic eyes. She saw him brown and enormous, clad in khaki, fighting the Germans. What difference did it make that he was an officer or a tommy? The great thing was that he was a soldier and no one had a right to criticise his will to be one. She had quarrelled with several people about him and had been rude to the Prime Minister's wife. Stump Arkwright had worried her to exasperation. He had given her to understand that the Government considered William's act one of simple disloyalty and would exercise no influence on his behalf, and she had told him to mind his own business, that she was bored with politicians and politics and that he needn't come to see her again until he had gone out and won a Military Cross or lost a leg.

There was far too much talk in London about

Helen's mysterious absence. Now that she, Helen, was back, she must show herself and put an end to their miserable tongues. She, Peggy, had an angry feeling of responsibility for Helen and admitted the obligation of protecting her. Her brain worked rapidly during her drive to the country, the morning after Brandon's visit. She saw what she had to do. She had to make Helen come with her to France and work.

Arriving at Red Gables, she made straight for the library and walked in without knocking. Helen was seated on the window seat, her back to the garden, her hands crossed in her lap, her head bent forward. Lady Sidlington spoke abruptly:

"My dear, they wouldn't let me in; I was too surprised to snub any one. Brandon seems to have forgotten me. So you're back at last. I came to find out when you were expected."

"I gave orders that I would see no one," said Helen lifting her head.

If Lady Sidlington was startled by the face that was turned to her, she gave no sign of it.

"Well, my dear, you've got to see me because I'm here and I want you to give me a thousand pounds."

"A thousand pounds? What for?"

"For my hospital. I'm taking a hospital out to France and have spent on it all that I can afford."

Helen looked at her without speaking. Lady Sidlington described that look to herself afterwards

as stupid. It was as stupid as the look of a drunkard or a drugged person.

"I don't know whether I've got a thousand pounds to give you," said Helen slowly.

Lady Sidlington was troubled. There was a heaviness and a senselessness about Helen that dismayed her. The thought came to her that perhaps Jimmy had been right and that something dreadful and horrid had happened in Paris. She spoke more gently.

"Well, dear, you'll give me what you can."

"Help yourself," said Helen idiotically; "you're welcome to all I've got."

Lady Sidlington was disturbed; the remark was foolish, and the heavy lidded gaze that remained fixed upon her, was baffling.

"You've not been drinking, have you?" she asked suddenly.

"Drinking?"

"You're not drunk, or drugged, are you?"

"Oh no, I'm not drunk."

"Well then, what's the matter?"

"Nothing."— A vague gleam of anger appeared in the heavy stupefied eyes. "I told you I had given orders not to admit any one; I did not want to see you, that's all."

"That's it," whispered Lady Sidlington's instinct; "make her angry."

"You're behaving disgracefully," she announced in a loud tone. "What are you going to do? The

world is at war, and you sit here with your hands folded. Aren't you going to help? Aren't you going to do something? What right have you to sit twiddling your thumbs, when all the men in the world are going out to be killed?"

"Hold your tongue, Peggy."

"I won't hold my tongue, you make me ashamed."

Certainly she had not anticipated the effect of the word. At the sound of it Helen had sprung to her feet, and standing, not upright, but crouching as if for a spring, had thrown it back at her.

"Ashamed — who are you to know what it is to be ashamed?" And then suddenly she had gone off into a long wild shriek of laughter through which Peggy caught the words "humiliation" and "shame" cut into syllables by the shrill horrid gurgles.

She did not realize then what it meant. She had been much too frightened; not until that night with Helen in the bed beside her in her own room in Barchester Square did she begin to see. She had listened petrified to that laughter; it had stopped suddenly as it had begun. She had been afraid to speak, and then suddenly Helen had said normally.

"I am sorry, Peggy; I'm behaving like a fool."

She had been like a lamb after that and had agreed to everything, even to going to France with the hospital.

Only once had she said anything strange; she had turned back at the front door:

"I had meant to wait here," she had said, "but I knew I should wait for nothing. It doesn't matter

where I am. Jimmy told me that I was dead."

It was in the car going to town that Peggy had started to give William's mesage, but Helen had stopped her.

"Jimmy told me, that and more, much more. We won't speak of William again if you don't mind."

That night Lady Sidlington wrote to Captain Gower at Aldershot.

"I know now, though I don't know why I know, that she cares for William, but that other man has destroyed her self-respect. If you have any news of W. B. keep me posted. Helen is, I believe, determined not to try and find him. If you can get leave, come to see us before we go."

But they did not see Jimmy again in London. Orders came for the unit to start for France three days later, destination unknown.

PART FOUR

PART IV

I

THE war had reached its apotheosis. Death let loose upon Europe had not yet diminished the fighting power of nations, organized for each other's destruction. Hunger was not yet threatening the authority of governments who had pressed not only the men, but the mountains and plains and rivers of their countries, into the service of annihilation.

Human beings were diminished to pin points in size and importance. Men had suffered their identity to be taken from them. Like animals, they had taken on the colour of the earth, so as to be invisible to the enemy. Their disguise was uniform. Each man looked like every other man. No man was distinguishable from any other.

The brain of the world had ceased to take account of individuals; it dealt in units called armies, moved men across continents in loads of a hundred thousand and sent them to death in uncounted conglomerate masses. Cities, like buckets tipped up to pour out their contents, were emptied of men, keeping a residuum of women and children and the aged.

The face of the earth was changed. Populations had shifted and were incessantly shifting. The pleasant places and the busy places of a former era

were vacant. Hordes of men lived on the barren surface of deserts, inhabiting tents, or holes in the ground, or heaps of broken stone. In some places cities had been destroyed and to balance these, other cities of wood and of tin had been manufactured in haste. These new cities were perched on the earth without foundations, and were transported in pieces from one point to another.

A scar showed across the face of Europe. It stretched from the coast of Belgium to the Adriatic Sea, and on the edges of this scar myriads of men clung like insects. Viewed from a high point in the sky, the men looked like beetles; struggling through debris, burroughing underground; crawling over the obstructing edge of the ditch and dropping dead in it. Stretching away to either side, the earth appeared, pitted like small-pox, and along the length of this area ran little curling puffs of smoke and flashes of fire. In some places the smoke smothered the whole and the myriad little clump of men were to be seen crawling into it in thick swarms. These were the places where battles were raging.

The long thin ditch appeared, to the observer in the sky, an unpassable barrier. It was scarely distinguishable, yet to cross it the easiest and the only way seemed to be to go round the globe of the earth and come up on the other side.

During the summer of 1916 the place on the map of the greatest smoke and the greatest noise and the greatest swarm of men, were the fields of Picardy in France. It was said in the world of men, where Pol-

iticians and newspaper Editors still occupied severally the usual individual's number of cubic feet of space, that very large effectives were engaged in the battle of the Somme but scarce any one had an exact conception of what the term meant. God in his silent heaven, beyond the sound of war, saw masses of infinitesimally tiny corpses strewn like dead flies across a pock-marked desert: the politician in London saw rows and rows of figures on sheets and sheets of paper. The soldier, who had struggled like a burdened insect crossing a quaking earth, saw what an insect can see, a heap of rubbish, stones, bricks, lumps of mud, fragments of bodies like his own, a cloud of smoke behind him, a wall of earth in front of him, and overhead fragments of glittering sky.

He, the soldier, the infinitesimal human being who through the turmoil went on with his minute business, he had become accustomed to war. His mind, a tiny spark, lighted in the recesses of his tiny brain, enclosed in the frail walls of his skull that one fragment of flying iron could dash to fragments, his mind that burned steadily a pure inextinguishable flame, had generated an idea. He believed in himself. His idea was that he could and must alone, stand up against the raving terror of the elements of universal destruction. He opposed his small indomitable self to the monstrous war. He met it, he recognized it, he lived with it.

Accepting the war, the mentality of the human race was undergoing a change, yet no one noticed the change. The governments of Europe did not real-

ise that men were different. Human beings appeared diminished in size, while every hour they were growing bigger. They were growing into giants, but the scene of the war was so great that they continued to appear as specks in it. They themselves did not realize the change. They realised nothing but the war. None of them expected to see the end of it. They lived in it as if it were going to last forever. The killing would go on until there was no one left to kill. The end of the war might come and with it, the end of the world, but this did not concern them; they would not be there to see it.

Life was distributed to them daily with their rations. They accepted it, day by day in packets. So much discomfort, cold, wet, dust, thirst, soreness, sickness, fear, excitement, blood, hunger, pain; these things were doled out to them. They took the day's supply and to offset the monotony of it, stole what they could find to steal. They helped themselves to what came in their way. In the name of the death that awaited them tomorrow, they celebrated the mug of beer today. The red cheeks of a village girl, a game of cards in a dug-out, an extra pipe of tobacco, these were their compensations for sure annihilation. They had established a new equilibrium.

Living in the war was not living in the world. The new existence had nothing in common with life. It did not even resemble the struggle of prehistoric man against savage nature, for nature had disappeared with civilisation and man was left, to face the powers of darkness across the cracked and blighted

surface of a ruined earth. It was as if the earth had rushed ahead through æons of time, and as if the life of the earth had died. The warmth of it had grown cold, the germinating power of its soil was exhausted. Its forests and fields had withered away. Only the old worn shell of it remained, bleak, barren, covered with the refuse of uncounted discarded ages. The gods had abandoned it and forgetting the man that still lived by some freak of gigantic circumstance on its crust, had turned their attention to other, living planets.

Humanity, abandoned, seemed to have undertaken the business of its own extermination. In despair at being forgotten, it had determined on death and in order to achieve its own extinction, it had improvised a temporary existence in the incomprehensible landscape of the earth it held in horror.

A fury of activity animated the oozing desert, where once in former ages had been the fertile fields of Picardy. Men poured across the dead face of the earth, in an angry flood, bringing with them infernal engines that created a great noise. The muddy plain was strewn with iron. The roads were snakes of iron on whose length grinding engines, with heavy wheels fitted one behind another like scales.

Waves of dull incessant sound beat against the sides of the cold hills. Other noises broke at intervals out of the resounding sky, screams, whistling shrieks, and the sound of avalanches crashing down into the echoing caverns. There was a feeling of

concussion in the air as if the whole plateau with its hordes of men were being rushed through space at an incredible speed. The land looked as if it were swept by a devastating wind that had churned up the earth like water.

A battle was preparing. Another chapter in the history of the effort of the human race to die was about to be written on the stained page of time.

Some fifteen miles behind the scene of battle near a sheltered bend in the river under a protecting rise of ground, a part of the village remained clinging to the soil. Its ruins appeared incredibly old. Half the church tower was there above a heap of stones, a crazy remainder of a forgotten era. A dozen hovels crouched in the mud, windowless, but capped still by torn roofs. For the rest, stones, and bits of masonry stuck up like teeth out of the ground.

Men inhabited the ruins, men came and went through the single muddy alley that still resembled a street. An unconquerable instinct of recognition had urged them to inhabit this place. Determined upon death, they still clung to the semblance of dwellings that reminded them of other places that had once given them comfort and shelter.

The plan of the battle that was preparing was housed in the interior of one of these hovels. A general had established his headquarters there. He sat on a canvas stool before a wooden table with a map spread before him and around the table stood his officers. The general was talking. He pointed

out the places on the map with the one finger remaining on his mutilated hand.

Beyond the gaping window troops were passing. Their heads on a level with the broken window still moved endlessly by. Three bobbing helmets were perpetually framed in the aperture. The men passing by in the mud of the road, paid no attention to the officers in the room. They looked neither to the right nor to the left. They ignored the general and the pointing finger that was indicating the place on the map where they were going to die. Out of the distant past that they remembered, through the confused and menacing eternity that surrounded the village, they came into the grotesque mockery of its shelter and they passed through it and moved on out of it, to the battle that was preparing.

They marched, bending forward under the heavy knapsacks that they carried; each one close to the next one and all moving together. The color of their sodden clothes that once had been blue, was the color of the earth, their heavy mass sank into the stuff of the road, their boots were inextricably mixed up in the clinging mud; they covered the long road and were a part of it, forming on it an extra layer that was fused into the deep mud of its bottom, so that the whole road moved with them, and their glinting helmets were like a stream of pebbles carried along by its current.

A woman was walking in the road a mile beyond the village. She wore a white kerchief on her head, and a dark cloak round her shoulders. The mir-

acle of her presence was not noticeable, because she too had lost her identity and resembled the landscape. The soldiers made room for her on the edge of the road. She walked steadily as they walked, her head bent, planting her heavy boots slowly one, then, another, in the oozing mud. The fact of her being there, seemed neither strange nor wonderful, because her attitude denied that it was so. Her dreary hooded figure claimed its right to be there. It was bespattered with mud, and patient and unconcerned. She made no gesture, she did not turn her head. She walked through the mud as if she belonged there.

Nevertheless the army took cognisance of her presence. Out of its disciplined dumb mass, an obscure feeling of sympathy went out to her. The rows of men, passing her, one after another, would have welcomed her as one of them, if they could have. If their arms had been capable of making a gesture, they would have waved to her, but their arms were too heavy. If they could have spoken, they would have called out to her a greeting, but they could not. They had no voice with which to speak to her. The noise of cannon, and the wind, and the splashing suffocating mud, had done away with their voices. They had no faculty left, save the faculty of existing and moving on. All there was in them of the energy of life they needed to push one leg in front of the other. They had come a long way, such a long way that they had forgotten its beginning. They did not know where they had come from or

where they were going, they only knew that they could not stop. So they passed by the woman on the edge of the road, weary condemned beings that did not look quite like men, and out of their dogged determined despair they gave her what they could, the only thing they had to give, the recognition of comrades.

The road climbed to a hard sky-line. The panorama of the liquid desert widened out. Over all its slippery surface, were strewn men and animals and carts and guns, and in the midst of them appeared a city of wooden sheds with low peaked roofs. Two posts, standing stark by the roadside, indicated an entrance to the unboundaried settlement. On a painted board between them was written in black letters H. O. E. 29. A sentry in an oblong box that stood on end by the gate post saluted the woman who turned in under the sign. She did not look back as she crossed the open windy space before the wooden sheds. Her figure was a minute thing in that wide place. The white handkerchief on her head was like a solitary snowflake fluttering across the mud in the wind.

II

THE French Evacuation Hospital No. 29 covered a square mile of the plain. It had a population of five thousand souls. An engineer had built it in an ugly symmetry. Its long rows of unpainted sheds formed a system of straight alleys leading out from a central square where ambulances unloaded the wounded. An improvised railway line ran between the rows of huts to the square. The place was naked and unsheltered. There was no tree or shrub anywhere. A thousand unshuttered windows glittered at each other across the bare ground, where scattered stretcher-bearers carrying their swinging burdens struggled against the wind. Except for the stretcher-bearers and the knot of men unloading the ambulances scarce anyone was to be seen. A doctor, blackbearded and bareheaded in a white coat bespattered with red blood, came out through a swinging door and went in through another. From somewhere behind the staring windows, a scream travelled out into the wind and was lost. All about, as if forming with their noise a throbbing band that encompassed the earth, the guns were pounding.

An officer in khaki with a red fez on his head and a cane in his hand stepped aside from the group of

ambulances to greet the woman coming towards him. He limped, his bow was ceremonious.

"Bonjour, Madame."

"Bonjour, Monsieur le Medecin chef."

"You have been walking?"

"I went to the cemetery."

"On such a day—"

"I took a wreath sent me by the wife of a man who died here. You do not object, Monsieur le Medecin chef?"

"Madame is free to do as she chooses, but it is not prudent. The crossroads is an unpleasant place."

"There was not much shelling."

"You are brave, Madame."

"You are indulgent, Monsieur."

Two orderlies passed carrying a corpse on a stretcher. The wind whipped at the edge of the coarse sheet that covered the stiff body.

"Hi — What — Stop — Name of God, where are you going?" burst out the officer in a loud voice. The old orderlies stopped and looked around dully over their burden. "Don't you know yet that this is not the way to the morgue? Go round to the back I tell you. Go, get along with you! Are you deaf, imbeciles! Name of God, what specimens! Pardon, Madame; this rabble they give me for orderlies."

"They are old men, Monsieur."

"They are idiots, Madame, idiots. Those that can hear can't see. Those that can see can't hear.

They send me all the broken down grandfathers and expect me to run a hospital with them. I swear, I shout, at night I am hoarse with shouting, I shock you. It is my business to shout, I beg pardon. Bonjour, Madame." He repeated his ceremonious bow.

"Bonjour, Monsieur." She turned away, but he stopped her.

"Madame Chudd. One moment!"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Be so kind as to tell your companions that the order has come to prepare for a heavy intake tomorrow."

"I will do so, Monsieur le Medecin chef."

"A train will leave at seven in the morning. At what time did you go to bed this morning, Madame? At four o'clock? I thought so. You will kill yourself, and that will help no one. I have given orders that all evacuable patients are to be evacuated, but all, you understand, without sentiment, strict selection, only the moribunds to be kept."

"I understand."

"We have beds for four thousand. There are at this moment two thousand five hundred patients in the hospital. Two thousand at a minimum must be evacuated. We must make room. The surgeons will cry out and call me names. They will make a fuss over this pet case and that pet case. Their beautiful operations, their knees, and their thighs and their heads, that they want to keep under observation! It is always the same story. They will

not understand. This is not a place for delicate surgery."

"It is a place for saving life."

"You ladies have too much heart."

"I am sorry that you should think so, Monsieur."

"This is no place for heart, Madame."

"I dare to think the contrary, Monsieur."

"Je vous présents mes hommages, Madame."

"Bonjour, Monsieur."

She left him and made her way to the nurses hut. "He is perfectly right," she said to herself. "This is no place for heart."

Long ago, when she had first come, she had an inspiring vision of the place. Its enormous activity and the sinister excitement that prevailed there, had been a stimulus. She had left Peggy Sidlington after a year of sporadic amateur work in the North, at the invitation of the French Inspector Gènéral, and had enrolled herself as a military nurse. Feeling herself a definite part of the great machine, she had experienced a sense of relief. It had seemed to her wonderful to take a serious part in the colossal contest between the business of killing and the business of saving life. The human flood that poured up the roads past them, flowed back to them a stream of poisoned wreckage. The hospital dealt with the wreckage. She had seen herself for a time as one of a band of life savers, wading through a perpetual storm to the rescue of pitiful survivors.

She had lost her vision of the place. She worked in it now blindly unthinking and almost unfeeling.

Pity had given way under the overwhelming fact of horror, to apathy. The sight and sound of suffering, no longer conveyed to her any sensation. She reacted to it, like an accurate machine made to deal with it. Her gesture responded to its appeal competently; her brain registered its needs, but her mind failed to understand its meaning. It had been a question of becoming a machine or going mad. She realized this and did not condemn but merely disliked herself.

Her duty was to receive the wounded in the great central shed of the hospital as they came from the trenches. They were brought to her on stretchers and laid on the floor. Each man had a ticket tied to his coat on which was written the nature of his wounds. It was her business to examine each one and pick out the most urgent cases, and rush them through to the surgeons. It was her duty to know who in that mass of torn humanity was nearest the point of death. She had learned to read the signs on their faces and limbs. The green pallor of a face, the sweat on a forehead, a pinched nose, a jerky movement of the legs, a thick rattle in the throat, a peculiar odor, these things spoke to her. She understood the language. Wrapped in their great coats, covered with mud, stained with rusty blood, soiled bandages showing, crowded one against another like battered parcels, she would sort them out, see at a glance that the one had all but bled to death, that death already had claimed another, that yet another, though suffering agonies, could wait.

They passed before her, an endless, helpless procession of recumbent bodies. They were carried in and laid at her feet. Under her direction their clothes were cut from them, their bodies washed, their wounds dressed. She gave them stimulants, drinks, warmed their feet, bandaged their wounds and sent them on to the surgeons. Some of them died in her presence and were carried away to the morgue, all passed on to make room for others. She had no time to know them. It was impossible to remember them. She never learned their names. Sometimes after a burst of work she would ask the operating room nurses, what had become of one or another, identifying them by their wounds, but it was difficult to trace them as far as a ward. If she went for a moment to one of the wards, she recognized no one. The men were transformed. The clean, white bandaged figures in the rows of beds, were a different race from the bearded, mud-encrusted bundles that were laid on the floor of her shed.

But she realized them in the mass and in her own way, absolutely and ultimately, as if she with them had been put down into Hell forever; they belonged to her and she to them. Under a curse, she loved them. Their hideousness had become to her grandeur. She recognized the nobility of their distorted mangled limbs. Their stoicism, their supreme courage kept forever alive her deep despairing admiration, and their tenacious hold on life filled her with awe. On her knees amongst them, cutting, strip-

ping, binding, washing, she fought with them for the life they wanted. Grimly, and bitterly, she helped them to live, knowing how much easier it would be for them to die.

They seldom spoke to her. They never complained and she herself spoke little. Their common struggle was carried on fiercely in silence broken only by grunts, or stifled groans and quick exclamations. They obeyed the language of her hands, and responded to the pressure of her fingers. They allowed themselves to be handled by her and she handled them competently, for their salvation. They knew this, and she knew that they knew it. Through the thick envelope of their horrible disguise, their idea reached her and her understanding travelled back to them through the living touch of her hands. Defying the purpose of the war, they willed to live. She willed to keep them alive. Communion was established between them.

Her personal consciousness was at its lowest possible ebb. She remembered almost nothing and looked forward to nothing. Only one idea of her own remained to her, and that remained with her always. She had had no news of her husband. She expected daily to hear of his death. The idea in its form of an eternal question stared at her anew each day. It kept her awake for a time each night, no matter how great her physical exhaustion. "Is he still alive? Is he wounded? Is he at this instant being killed?" These questions she asked her-

self, while she lay awake, in her cubicle in the nurses hut.

Some companionship she found in the Hospital community. Her orderlies were her friends. They were old men, most of them had been farmers. They were grizzled, weather beaten and dirty, they were deaf and rheumatic and lazy; they were stupid and patient and careful. Their heavy gnarled hands accustomed to guiding a plow and hoeing the soil, were tender with the wounded men. Their rough voices were kind. Some of them had grandchildren. They took hold of mangled men as if they were babies. Their untidiness exasperated her, their stupidity maddened her, their simple goodness was a repose to her soul. Ruling them and scolding them and teaching them, she depended on them and their presence was a comfort to her. Sometimes they made her laugh.

Of the doctors she saw very little. She was surprised at the interest some of the nurses took in the doctors. She liked the nurses without getting to know them. They were a cheerful chattering lot of French women, whom she saw at meals. The only one with whom she had ever talked, was the Infirmière Major, Mademoiselle de Vaumont. She had never seen any one the least bit like Mademoiselle de Vaumont. She was not sure, given time and leisure to do so, whether she would end by loving her or by finding her merely a bore. The large woman with her aristocratic crooked face under its

false front of auburn hair, her large emotional ungainly bosom, her shrill laughter, her huge untiring feet, her fanatic religious devotion, made up a baffling creature. She openly despised the doctors as beneath her in social position as indeed they were. She reverenced the many priests who acted as orderlies. She lavished unquenchable and untiring maternal affection upon her patients. The nurses adored her. Helen certainly did not adore her, but the thought came to her sometimes, that if she were in trouble the French woman might help her. She felt that Mademoiselle de Vaumont respected her, because she worked hard and didn't make a fuss, went out to the kitchen hut for her own hot water to wash in and cleaned her own shoes and tried to eat the meat and beans that were put before her. Sometimes at night, when work was slack, they would wash and iron their kerchiefs together in the mess-room after the others had gone to bed. They would talk then, as they heated the irons on the small glowing stove, about religion and the war and the character of the French people. Never did they mention their own personal affairs. They knew nothing about each other. Helen was grateful to the woman under whose authority she worked for respecting her incognito.

It did not occur to her to wonder whether any of the people around her thought it strange that she should be alone, the only English person among them. She was not conscious of herself as an object of interest or curiosity. When the nurses told her

that she looked ill, she smiled and said that she was perfectly well. It seemed to her superfluously kind of them. She was tired. They were all tired. Her feet were swollen, so were their feet. Most of the time, her back ached. She had chilblains. They all had chilblains. These things did not trouble her. The only thing that bothered her was an almost constant sensation of nausea, it was as if her feeling of excited nervous apprehension had taken hold of her stomach. She forgot about this, while at work. It was only when off duty that she was obliged to notice it, and she was off duty as little as possible. She found that she could do an eighteen hour day regularly. During battles, she stayed on for thirty-six hours at a stretch, with time off for meals and a foot bath. Her work in the receiving hut was irregular. She began at any hour of the day that the wounded arrived and stayed on as a rule until midnight or one in the morning. There was no other nurse to relieve her. When she went to bed, she left word with her sergeant to call her whenever the work demanded it. He was so often obliged to do so, that of late she had taken to sleeping in her clothes. She would take a bath in her canvas tub and dress again before going to bed. Dressing was not a complicated business. She wore woollen underwear and breeches under her uniform. Her hair, done in a long plait, was wound in a knot under her veil. She made no attempt to take care of her hands. They were the hands of a working woman. One finger was misshapen. It had been

badly infected. She had neglected it, and it had had to be cut.

Once, she had fainted outside the hut. They had thought it fatigue. The médecin chef had wanted to send her away for a rest, but she had refused to go and had let them think what they would. To whom could she explain that the sight of a very large soldier in English uniform by the gate had made her run forward and stumble, and fall, when he turned a strange red face to her? To whom could she confide anything?

Sometimes, when British troops passed by, her heart would suffocate her with its thumping and she would hold tight to the nearest solid object, to prevent herself from running out like a lunatic to watch them. "What good would it do, you idiot?" she would say to herself. "If you stood all day every day on a cross road watching them go past, you would never see him. He may not even be in France. He may be in the Dardanelles;" but in spite of herself, she felt each time that perhaps that time he had actually been among the bent mud-coloured forms under the round tin hats, that were marching by in the road.

That night at nine o'clock to the minute the cannonade tripled its force. It was as if the earth during its spinning course through the heavens had leaped suddenly aside into a storm. The wounded men on the stretchers who were being carried to the train turned their heads to listen and the old orderlies with their shaded lanterns flickering in the wind

stopped to listen, and the Doctors playing cards round the lighted lamps of their mess rooms and the nurses in the wards busy with the patients who were being evacuated, all stopped what they were doing, to listen. Only the dying men left alone in their beds did not listen. They were dying, nothing could interrupt them, nothing could stop them dying. The roaring throb of the dark made to them no difference. No thundering message of death had for them any meaning. For them the last word was spoken. They lay still in their beds, in the shaking huts behind their rattling windows.

Mademoiselle de Vaumont coming into the nurses' hut at midnight found Mrs. Chudd sitting in the mess room, her cloak wrapped round her, her lighted lantern on the floor beside her. The fire in the stove had gone out. Blasts of wind and a throbbing noise invaded the cold room.

"You are not in bed?"

"No, I have just come in. And you?"

"I had to make up beds for tomorrow. All my men have gone but two."

The French woman sat down.

"Shall we make some chocolate?"

"The fire has gone out."

Neither moved. They sat huddled in their canvas chairs, staring at the dead stove and listening. The bare room with its rough inadequate walls was in shadow. Their lanterns shed a dim light by which they could see each other, but it was not each other that they saw.

"The attack is timed for six o'clock," said Mademoiselle de Vaumont.

"So I believe."

Their silence was swallowed up in the noise that surrounded them like a swirling flood.

Helen was watching her husband. She saw him from an infinite distance but with perfect precision. She saw him out in the dark on a field of mud, with an indistinguishable mass of men. He was one of them. He was one of a countless number destined to be killed in the morning.

The throbbing of the cannon was like the pounding of a clock beating out the running seconds of the life of the earth that was rushing to an end.

III

THE world was cracking to pieces beyond there in the dark. The man heard it. He knew that it couldn't last more than a moment longer, but he didn't care. It would fly into fragments. He felt it straining. One blow right in the middle would do it, like that, no, that was to the side.— Where was He?

Voices spoke round him. He heard them, small, complete soft things, clearly audible in that cracking thunder.

"Attention!"

"Quietly —"

"For the love of God be careful."

"Life — Push — Higher —"

"Name of God —"

"There now. Another one."

Dark forms move round him. A coat brushed against his face. He would have remonstrated it if he could, but somehow he couldn't. He knew that he was helpless, but did not know why. He had no curiosity. Men were pushing and stumbling round him in the dark. He could not move. He knew without trying that he could not.

Another voice said: "Take the officers. That makes four. Drive direct to the Evacuation Hospital. Bad cases. Hurry!"

He opened his eyes. A glare of light showed a grizzled bearded face bending over him. The light went out. He felt himself lifted, swaying. He thought: "I am lying on a swinging rope. I shall fall off, I shall drop." He felt sick at his stomach. If only he could vomit, but he was flat on his back. Impossible to lift his head. There was a grinding noise. Something closed round him, suffocating. Suddenly the earth quaked, jolted, began to lurch beneath him. A spasm of intolerable pain seemed tearing his bowels out of him. He lost consciousness.

Another voice, this time a woman's. It said:

"Yes, there were four officers; one is dead."

A man's voice then:

"Send me the most pressing."

The woman's voice. "This one is."

"What's he got?"

"Penetrating wound of the abdomen."

"Ah! How's his pulse?"

"Very low."

"Has he vomited?"

"No."

"How long since he was wounded?"

"Six hours."

"Send him along to me, but stimulate him first."

"I've given him 10 cc. of camphorated oil."

"Good. Give one of sparteine, and one of cafeine."

"Very well."

The woman's voice speaking close beside him was

a voice that he knew. He had heard it many times before. It was a part of him. It linked him with himself. He recognized it as belonging to him. He was filled with a sense of peace and security. He felt like a little child, light and helpless and innocent. He wanted to cry and be comforted by the woman who was there to care for him. A miracle had saved him. He was at home. His mother must be in the next room. He imagined her white head shining in the lamplight. If he turned his own head on the pillow he would be able to see the clock on the chimney piece and the two green china dogs.

He made the effort. An unclean odour under his nose smothered him. The pillow under his head was hard. It was no pillow at all. It was his coat folded up. He remembered something. It eluded him, but he knew it was horrible. He was thirsty. He was very cold. His body felt to him like a cold stone, but in the middle of it there was a warm sticky sensation. He felt sick. He could not move his hands or his feet. He could only move his head. He rolled it to the other side, opening his eyes.

An object blocked his view. It was another head, there beside him, horribly close, with a bandage round it, hiding the eyes and ears. Only the blackened nose and jaw were visible. Wet blood oozed through the bandages. He knew what it was. He knew all about it. With infinite disgust and lassitude he looked at it. It brought back to him the thing he remembered. He remembered noise and

red light running along the edge of the dark, and a throng of men in the dark running forward and a hail of lead peltering, and a pellet hitting him. He was overcome with disappointment. Where was the woman with the voice he knew? She was not there. He was not at home; he had been cheated.

Was he back in the trenches? — No, he had no clothes on, only a blanket. How cold he was. But the blanket was too heavy, it was suffocating him. If he tried he could perhaps throw it off. It was hurting his stomach. If he tried like that —

"Lie still," said the woman's voice from beyond his feet. "If you move you will be sick. It is necessary for you to lie perfectly still." The voice was firm and convincing. He obeyed it.

"Please, may I have a drink?" he asked.

"No, I can't give you a drink."

"I am dying of thirst."

"I know — I am sorry — you must wait."

"Just a sip, just a drop."

"No, not now. I am giving you something that will diminish your thirst."

He whimpered as a dart of fire ran into his thigh.

Then he saw her rise above him like a white pillar. She was immensely tall. Her face was indistinct. It reminded him of some one, but before he could remember what she looked like, it was gone.

He hated her for not giving him a drink. A drink was the only thing to be desired in the world. She was cruel and powerful and vindictive. His

mouth was full of a bad sour thick taste. Waves of nausea swept over him, rolling up from hideous aching depths inside him. His tongue was enormous. It filled his mouth. It was unclean and covered with fur. If only he could spit it out! Ugh! the revolting flood surged to his lips. He lurched forward, throwing out his head. His entrails seemed bursting through the walls of his body. His head wavered. An abyss seemed to open up behind him — he would fall.

Arms supported him. He was saved. A basin was held beneath his lips. He was conscious of immense relief, and then of phenomenal weakness.

"Gargle this and spit out every drop," said the woman who had saved him. He filled his mouth with cold water. Conscious of the enormous sin it would be to yield to the temptation of swallowing he resisted temptation. Her divine presence gave him the strength to do it. She was an angel with a will of iron and he was her slave, eternally grateful. He spat out all the water, not one drop found its way down his throat. He was filled with a sense of victory. Surely she would commend him.

"You see, I am good," he murmured.

"Yes, very good, my poor child."

Then all at once, he knew her name.

"Hélène," he said weakly, "Hélène."

She did not answer. She was laying him flat again. She was going away. Panic seized him, he clutched her hand.

"Don't leave me."

"They are taking you to the radiograph now. I will go as far as the door with you." Her voice was cold and infinitely wise. She undoubtedly knew everything about him. She knew who he was and what they were going to do to him, and what had happened, and what was going to happen. Of course she knew; she was omniscient and omnipotent and she was his friend. She was marvellous and white and strong. His life depended on her; she had held him while he vomited filth; she was a saint.

They were by this time moving. He was swaying again. She walked beside him. Lying on his back he turned his head sideways to see her. She floated beside him; her head was in a white aureole. They went on and on, they passed under miles of interminable roof, that arched like a cave above him. He was in a cave of pain. She guided him. He was conscious of great solitude, yet he knew there were figures moving all about him. They were shadowy blurs. Their voices sounded far away. She was near, he could touch her sleeve. Strange mysteries of horror menaced him. Her reality was a guarantee of safety.

In a black hole, they put him down. A huge red face with a black beard came down on him. He cried out to her:

"Hélène, don't leave me!"

She said: "I must go; there are others waiting."

"Other what?"

"Other wounded men."

"Ah, it's that is it?"

The red face said. "There's the orifice of entrance. The ball has remained. There's no other wound."

They were stripping him of his blankets and of the covering round his stomach.

She said. "Au revoir! Bon courage!" She was gone. He called her name despairingly, but his voice made no sound. There was no more light, only a red spark somewhere down there way off like the signal of a train on a dark night. Monsters had him now in their power. He was helpless. She had abandoned him. He resigned himself to the horrors of the dark.

Helen marvelled to herself as she went back to her ward, that even the gods of war could indulge in irony.

It was two o'clock in the morning. The glaring light in the entrance hut, showed up with infernal distinctness the double row of wounded men, lying on stretchers one against another. The floor was littered with refuse, piles of clothing, soaked with mud, boots, helmets, water flasks, soiled bandages, dirt. Orderlies were coming and going, scrubbing, gathering up bundles of clothes. Pails of dirty water stood about. Basins full of blood. Tin cups. Hot water bottles. Two men, naked on tables behind a screen were being washed. The hideous intimacy of their wounds glared up from their flesh, unashamed. A man in delirium with nothing on him but a belt of flannel and the head bandage that held together his skull, was sitting up on his stretcher

gesticulating and shouting to the prone bodies round him like some mad preacher. He was unheeded. His congregation lay about him in attitudes that mocked his ravings; some on their stomachs, some with twisted legs, some hanging off their stretchers, head downward, most flat on their backs staring upward. The light showed up the dark stains of the life blood that was oozing out of each one of them.

At the end of the long shed the door kept opening incessantly to the endless procession of arrivals.

The grizzled orderlies moved slowly with feet of lead. They were tired, they were like grey beetles, crawling about under the weight of an impossible task.

From the centre of the hut she called out to them.

"Now then, some energy. We are all tired, but it's no use saying so. Come, Edouard, quick, cut that one's clothes off. This one is ready, carry him through to operating room No. 5. Clear away this pile, my old one.— No, little father, don't touch him, let him die in peace — Help me lift this one. And those basins must be emptied. Remenez go to the pharmacie for more ether and iodine. Have those bottles filled quickly. Now then, a little courage, my friends."

They obeyed her. With their old joints creaking and their ancient faces sweating, they bent again to the endless business.

An hour later an orderly from the operating rooms came for her.

"Monsieur Groult wants you."

She found St. Christe lying on an operating table, motionless. A group of doctors stood round the shining room, chatting and smoking cigarettes. Their aprons were streaked with blood, their faces humorous. A nurse flew through the door and out again with a happy intense smile on her face. Beyond the thin partition the electric engines of the sterilizing apparatus, roared and whizzed. Clouds of steam came through the door of the sterilizing room into the corridor. The doctors and students were discussing with enthusiasm the beauty of the operation just finished.

The head surgeon said to her.

"It seems the captain is a friend of yours."

"Yes, I know him."

He smiled sympathetically, his eyes feverishly bright in his drawn face.

"I've extracted the bullet. There were two perforations of the small intestine. We must try and pull him through. Do you know his mother's address?"

"The Princess lives in Paris, 11 rue."

"Thank you, I'll send a wire in the morning."

"It is very serious then?"

"All that is most serious."

She was conscious of the eyes of the surrounding doctors fixed on her with interest. Had Jocelyn called her name again — she wondered.

She turned away.

"You might see that the captain is put properly to bed, Madame."

"If you wish, Monsieur, but they are arriving constantly. There are waiting for you now two abdomens, three knees, a fractured pelvis, as for the rest, many head cases, legs, shoulders —"

"You don't wish then, particularly to take care of the captain?"

"No, Monsieur."

"Ah, very well." He lost interest in her and turned to give orders to some one else. The faces of the doctors expressed astonishment and disappointment. She left them and went back to her reeking hall, that had become of a sudden a refuge.

Out of the prostrate silent crowd, a voice was calling. It came to her faint and plaintive.

"Madame, ma sœur, Madame, where are you?"

She could not at first tell from which recumbent body it came; up and down the rows of them she searched for it.

"Ma sœur, ma sœur!" sounded the wail of distress. It was the blind man who had lain next to Jocelyn de St. Christe. She had seen on his ticket the words: "Blind, shot through the eyes," and had left him. No urgent call in his case, he was blind forever. Then she had forgotten him. Now his voice summoned her. She went to him, sliding between his form and the next one and took his hand.

"Ah, you are there!" The sightless bound head did not move, but a great sigh of relief.

"Yes, my friend, I am here."

"It is well," he said in the tone of a comforted

child, and then he added. "I thought that I was abandoned here, all alone."

She looked round the crowded place; "No, my friend, you are not alone," she said, then suddenly her nerves gave way. She began to cry. Her face twisted. She fled to the end of the hut behind the screen. Her orderlies were greatly concerned. No one had ever seen her cry.

"It is the weariness," muttered one.

"She's not strong," put in another.

"All the same it's a dog's job this," growled another.

They watched her miserably from under their shaggy eyebrows. He who was known as "little Father" brought her coffee in a tin cup. She smiled at him through her tears. Presently she went on with her work. Dawn found her kneeling on the floor with a boy of nineteen in her arms.

"Maman," he breathed, "Ma pauvre Maman, adieu." His slim body, slippery with cold sweat, clothed by the soaked bandages that bound his wounded chest and shattered legs, was heavy and cold against her. One grey arm tightened convulsively round her neck. His head fell backward. His jaw worked regularly, with the jerking twitch of death. Remenez, the priest stood over them muttering prayers for the soul that was slipping away. The working of the jaw ceased. No more breath came through the parted lips. There was no flicker from the open eyelids. She laid him down as the first rays of the sun came through the windows

of the fearful place. Of all the dead who had died that night in her presence, this boy had wanted the most to live.

She staggered to her feet. The old priest said.

"Madame, it is morning, you must go and rest."

"And you?" she asked.

"I will go soon, when the others come on duty. There are no more wounded arriving at present."

"You are a good man," she said, "and a faithful priest of God."

"But what has God to do with this?" she asked herself as she crept away over the stained floor that glittered with the slime of wasted life, and went out into the glorious morning, of the new incredible day.

It was however known that day in the hospital that a captain in the "Chasseurs à pied" had come in wounded during the night, that he had called for Madame Chudd, by her Christian name and that the latter, whom every one had believed so cold and businesslike had broken down after the operation and had wept. Romance, a strange creature of Heaven, had found its way across a battlefield and had alighted on the settlement of wooden sheds.

Helen wrapped in her woollen dressing gown with her feet in a pail of hot water and mustard, heard the nurses whispering beyond the thin walls of her cubicle:

"He is very bad."

"And as handsome as a God."

"A croix de guerre with two palms."

"Susanne is nursing him in the officers' ward, and you know —"

"You think so really — What an extraordinary thing. Is she with him now?"

"I don't know." The two whisperers moved away with a rustle of petticoats.

Helen heard them without taking in the meaning of what they said. Their voices reached her ears but not her brain. Her head felt very light and empty, and her feet unnaturally large. Throbs of pain travelled up them to her knees and thighs. She had lost contact with reality, except for her feet. Those aching limbs down there in the steaming pungent water held her down, otherwise she felt that she would float away into nothingness. She had only to close her eyes to die. Dying was so easy, death was so simple. She had watched it. It came like a healing angel. It laid its hand on a struggling thing of agony and the struggling ceased. She remembered rolling heads and distorted limbs, and starting eyes, and wagging choking tongues. She heard the groans, the short panic-stricken panting breaths that preceded the absolute, unutterable quiet of death.

She thought: "If William is dead, he is quiet, and I need not live any longer." And then, "if he is dead, he knows the truth."

It seemed to her that the only happy men in the world were those who had died. She imagined their souls like little puffs of white smoke floating away through the glorious day, while their bodies were being carried to the morgue.

IV

MADEMOISELLE DE VAUMONT returning from early mass in the chapel next the morgue, was joined by the sergeant of the officers' ward. She had adored the blessed Virgin with desperation that morning. Kneeling on the bare ground, her heart sick with the horror of the dreadful night she had prayed for faith. If her faith failed her, her reason she felt would go with it. If there were no peace in no Heaven and no solace, no comfort, no joy, anywhere, for any one of the men who went by chattering delirious thousands to the gates of death, then the world was a mad house and she the slave of a monstrous delusion.

She knelt motionless before the rude altar, whispering feverishly while blasphemous thoughts like crazy imps, darted through her dazed brain. A nauseating odour from the dead bodies beyond the partition permeated the hallowed place. The lame priest Remenez administered the Holy Sacrament as if in a trance. His hands trembled. His eyes were sunken. There was an expression of fanatic peace on his grimy bearded face.

The mystic ritual steadied her brain. Her anguish in doubting God that was like the anguish of a woman afraid of being betrayed by the man she adored, produced a revulsion of feeling. She con-

demned herself for doubting, and abased herself before the divine being, and was ashamed. Minutely she scrutinized her own conduct during the last dreadful twenty-four hours. She was not sure that she had not failed in her duty. Her sense of personal weakness overwhelmed her. She implored forgiveness from the Holy Son of God.

She came away fortified. Praying; she no longer questioned the wisdom of the Divine Spirit who sent men to death in thousands. She knew that she could not understand and that it was not necessary for her to understand. Her self abasement comforted her. She was made strong by the realization of her own sinfulness. God was wise and merciful, no matter what the horrors of the earth might lead one to suppose. She believed this. She must believe it, her life depended on her believing it.

The sergeant of the officers' ward said that a captain in the chasseurs à pied had come in during the night and was asking for Madame Chudd. Mademoiselle de Vaumont listened to him, showing no surprise, and followed him into the officers' hut.

Two rows of haggard heads stared from above disordered blankets.

"In which bed is he?" she asked.

"No 12, at the end, behind the screen."

Here and there from stained pillows a flicker of intelligence greeted her nod of good morning as she made her way to the end of the hut.

She leaned down above the grey moist face of the man in bed No. 12.

"Ah, yes, I know him," she murmured. But the vague eyes that half opened at the sound of her voice, showed no signs of recognition.

"So it is you, dear Jocelyn, my poor child," she said tenderly, taking his hand.

The sick man spoke plaintively.

"Where is Hélène? Why doesn't she come?"

"She is resting."

"Resting?" he queried vaguely, and then, like a pettish child: "But she will come soon, won't she? She's sure to come, isn't she?"

"But assuredly," she soothed him, straightening his blankets.

He moved his head. An idiotic smile half delirious twisted his features. He seemed by some play of his damp features to be beckoning her closer. She leaned down.

"I'll tell you," he whispered, "I'll tell you in confidence, I must see her, I have something important to tell her; a secret, you understand. You must call her, you see? It's like that, you understand."

The smile died away, a desperate sane entreaty darkened his now wide-open eyes.

"Find Hélène," he commanded.

"I will find her," said Mademoiselle de Vaumont.

He closed his eyes. The stillness that came over him was like the stillness of death.

Henriette de Vaumont was a nun who had never taken the veil. She had lived like a nun in the midst of a world of men, since the day that her five brothers had forced her to abandon her dream of en-

tering a convent. She adored her brothers. The family conference to which uncles and aunts and cousins had been summoned by the impetuous five and over which the plump little old mother of the big men presided with timid wistfulness, had been a clamour of affectionate reproach and entreaty. The note of affection had rung sincere through the loudest and highest bursts of protestation. It was sufficient tribute to the goodness and sweetness of the dear big plain creature under discussion that all of those present, and among them were some of the proudest men and the most elegant women of France, declared that they could not do without her. They had embraced her, and cried out at her shrilly in emotional terms of endearment. Tears had been shed. The little mother had wept gently, the brothers had tramped up and down waving their arms, but at last an agreement had been reached. She was not to be forced to marry, no further proposal of that kind would ever be made, she was to be allowed to become that strange and abhorrent thing, an old maid, provided she remained among them. She had remained, giving her life to her relations and the poor. It had not seemed to her incongruous to live in the world and follow the humble way of the blessed saints. In turn with her aunt and cousins she had fulfilled the duties of Lady in Waiting to the Duchess d'Orleans and the Comtesse de Paris. Carefully and conscientiously, she had divided her time between the hospitable Royal Families of Europe and the slums of Paris.

Her ungainly figure was seen periodically at Windsor Castle and Buckingham Palace. For as regular periods it disappeared into the tenement houses of the poorest arrondissement of Paris. She admitted the obligations of her family. With them, she mourned the fall of the monarchy, but she loved her seamstresses and washerwomen. Her relations thought her queer but they kept to their part of the bargain and did not interfere. Only one of her more distant cousins, the Princess of Narbonne had indulged in mockery. She was known to have said: "Henriette, poor creature, it is because she is so ugly that she wished to espouse the Christ," but later, the Princess had defended Henriette to her son.

"Why do I have her about the house? — Because she is good and happy. She is the only perfectly cheerful person of my acquaintance, and she prays for me without ever letting me know it. If God forgives me my sins it will be her doing."

However that might be, Mademoiselle de Vaumont at the age of forty-five loved God and understood the world. She was not easily shocked by the latter. Its habits were to her an old rather than tiresome story, it held for her no surprises.

She was not in the least scandalized by the fact, for such she assumed it to be, that Jocelyn de St. Christe was the lover of Mrs. Chudd. Deep in her old maid's heart she had a romantic sympathy with lovers. She felt that she had come on the solu-

tion of the Englishwoman's mysterious sadness. They were lovers and they had been separated by the war. A miraculous coincidence had brought them together and she pitied them both, for she was sure that Jocelyn was going to die.

A doctor stopped her at the door of the officers' ward. He suggested to her in a discreet undertone that it would be advisable that Madame Chudd should come to sit beside the "captaine." Monsieur Groult, the Head Surgeon believed that the latter might pull through if he could be kept perfectly quiet. Keeping him quiet was extremely difficult. He knew that Madame Chudd had been up all night, but he was sure, that under the very special circumstances she would not mind being disturbed. It was an interesting case. The operation had been most successful. Monsieur Groult would be desolated, if things were to go wrong.

Mademoiselle de Vaumont agreed with him gravely.

A group of nurses looking somewhat like arctic explorers were drinking their morning coffee round the stove in the mess room as she entered. They greeted her with a chorus of cheerful good mornings. She put a cup of coffee and two slices of bread on a plate and went down the corridor to Mrs. Chudd's door, knocking timidly. It seemed to her that she was about to do a necessary but indelicate thing. She was confused at the idea of intruding on another's secret. Her errand was both tragic and awk-

ward. She must convey somehow the true impression that she had come in sympathy, and without curiosity.

Helen was in bed. Only the top of her smooth head showed above the grey blankets.

"Yes, what is it?" she asked dully of the big woman looming above her.

"I have brought some coffee, I hope you were not asleep, I am so sorry."

"No, I wasn't asleep. It is most good of you." The long gaunt creature in the rough bed pulled herself up to a sitting posture and taking the plate and cup began drinking the coffee in large gulps.

Mademoiselle de Vaumont sitting miserably on the foot of the bed, her little pitying eyes fixed on the thin face between the two long plaits of fair hair, waited for the coffee to be finished.

"How ill she looks," she said to herself. "How she must have suffered. Her eyes are too large for her face. They seem to be falling back into her head from sheer weight. There is nothing left to her face. Poor thing! Poor thing."

She nerved herself to speak: "You are so brave," she faltered; "I cannot bear to tell you, but you are brave. I have sad news for you, a message."

The cup in Helen's hand rattled suddenly against the plate. A look of terror distorted her face.

"A message?" she echoed.

"Yes, a message from a wounded man."

"Quick, tell me; I am sent for, where?"

She plunged forward, was half out of bed.

"An officer is asking for you."

"An officer? No, he can't be an officer."

"My poor child, the capitaine de St. Christe is here, dangerously wounded."

"Yes, yes, I know; but the message — You said —"

"It is from him, he is asking for you."

"You mean, you mean! You are telling me that Jocelyn de St. Christe is sending for me?"

"Yes."

"That was the message?"

"Yes."

"Oh!" Helen groaned, her eyes closed. She fell back into the bed. She seemed scarcely to breathe. "I thought," she murmured, "that it was something else."

Mademoiselle de Vaumont saw her shudder, and her pallor became livid. The Frenchwoman was bewildered. Instinctively maternal she tucked the blankets round the thin shoulders. Helen lay quite still with her eyes closed.

Henriette de Vaumont stared helplessly at the enigmatic suffering before her.

"You knew?" she asked at last.

"About Monsieur de St. Christe? Oh, yes, I knew, I was there when he came in."

"You realize that he is gravely wounded?"

"Yes."

"The doctors have very little hope."

"I am exceedingly sorry."

"He is calling incessantly for you; Monsieur Groult asks you to come to him."

"I scarcely think that necessary."

Mademoiselle de Vaumont was shocked.

"You do not wish to go to him?" she gasped.

"No."

"Ah, I see. I have made a mistake." The French woman rose to go. She did not understand, and she recoiled from the mystery that no longer concerned her, since she could no longer help.

"I will tell the Doctor that you are too tired to come," she said coldly.

"Yes, tell him that," replied Helen.

Then Mademoiselle de Vaumont's good breeding broke down.

"You mean to say that you don't care if he dies," she cried.

"No, I don't care."

Helen heard the French woman go. She would have called her back to explain to her what she meant if she had not been so tired. She would have said that of course if she were ordered to nurse de St. Christe she would obey, that she was very sorry he was so ill, and that when she said she didn't care whether he died or not she meant that his death was no more terrible to her than the death of any other wounded man. She wondered whether such an explanation would have made things any better. Perhaps not. She realized that she had alienated the one person in the hospital upon whom she had counted for sympathy. Her solitude was complete.

But in spite of Madame Chudd's peculiar behaviour Jocelyn de St. Christe did not die. His mother found him very weak but clear-headed when she arrived three days later. Monsieur Groult, who had dismissed the English nurse's amazing attitude with a lift of exasperated shoulders, was delighted. The arrival of the Princess and her daughter the pretty Marquise de C . . . in the motor of the corps commander, accompanied by the general in person, created a flurry of pleasurable excitement in the community of surgeons and nurses. Monsieur Groult was very busy receiving congratulations and thanks. The general decorated the Comte de St. Christe with the Legion of Honour and took tea with the ladies in the Médecin Chef's office. Every one talked of the Princess's courage in venturing so near the line of fire. Eyes followed her from every doorway as she hobbled through the mud, leaning on Monsieur Groult's arm.

She begged permission to remain beside her son for a day or two. The permission was granted, with effusive apologies for the discomfort she must endure in such quarters. She professed herself perfectly satisfied with the two cubicles that were prepared for her daughter and herself in the nurses' hut.

The general took leave of her with a promise to send an officer the next day for news. He kissed the Princess's hand at the door of the nurses' hut, and she called him her " cher General et ami." The hospital staff were pleasantly thrilled.

"And now, Henriette, what's this Jocelyn tells me about an English woman, a nurse here," asked the Princess turning up her petticoat in front of her nurse's stove. "I arrive at my son's bedside, thinking to find him dying, and he says to me, after letting himself be kissed: 'What have you done with her?'—'with whom?' I ask. 'With Helen,' he raps out. 'This is the second time,' he insists. 'And I won't have it. She saved my life.' I am nonplussed. I smooth his forehead, I tell him I will see, I promise. What, my good Henriette, is it all about?"

"We have an English nurse here, dear Aunt, who knows your son."

"What is her name?"

"Madame Chudd."

"No, it's not possible, it can't be."

"*You* know her, Aunt?"

"Yes, I do, and I don't like her."

"I am sorry, Aunt; she is a good nurse."

"And she's been nursing Jocelyn, I suppose?"

"No, Aunt; as he told you, she has not been with him at all."

"Why not?"

"She refused."

"Refused?"

"Yes, Aunt, she refused." The Princess scowled.

"Where is she?"

"In her service."

"Shall I have to see her?"

"It will be difficult to avoid it. We are obliged

to have our meals here together; moreover, she has given you her room, I should say her bed."

"Given me her bed? Where does the creature sleep then?"

"Here on a camp bed."

"So I must see her at dinner time and thank her for giving me her bed?" The Princess made a face.

"It would be courteous."

"Well, well, if I must, I must; but I don't like it. Take me back to Jocelyn. I don't know my way; all these sheds are alike. What shall I tell him about his friend? It's very curious, very curious; I don't understand it."

But the Princess did not see Mrs. Chudd at dinner. The latter sent an orderly to tell the Infirmière Major that her work kept her. She excused herself from dinner.

That night at ten o'clock, Mademoiselle de Vaumont found her behind the screen at the end of the empty receiving hut, cleaning instruments. The older woman remonstrated.

"My dear, you must come and rest."

"I am not tired, Mademoiselle."

"But your work is finished; there are no arrivals."

Helen looked about her. "I like it here, I am at home here," she said.

Henriette de Vaumont was no fool, and her heart smote her. She knew that the Hospital staff had turned against Mrs. Chudd and that the latter was aware of it. She blamed herself for not having de-

fended the isolated Englishwoman. Her aunt had told her enough that evening after dinner to give her the clue she wanted. She understood her aunt.

She spoke timidly. "Come with me, come to my room. I have misjudged you; I want to have a talk with you, so that I can explain; the doctors, the nurses —"

"I can't talk," said Helen in a level concise tone. "I can't. If the staff is displeased, if they don't like me, if you don't want me any longer I can go away. Thank you for your kindness, but believe me, there is nothing to say; I cannot explain."

That night, the Princess had a whispered conversation of some intensity with her son in the darkened ward, at the end of which he turned his head from her with a groan. He did not mention Mrs. Chudd's name again.

V

DURING the days that followed Helen became more and more conscious of the fact that the nurses and doctors avoided speaking to her. One day passing the mess room she heard some one say: "But why doesn't she nurse her own people? She is English; we can quite well take care of our wounded without the help of a stranger."

She put on her cloak and rubber boots and went up the hill behind the Hospital. On the top of the hill, she sat down on a heap of stones and wondered what she should do. She must go away, but she did not know where to go. Peggy was in the North of France taking care of officers. She would be no help to her there. She must either go home, or ask the French authorities to transfer her to another hospital. Had she the courage to begin again among strangers? — For the first time she admitted to herself that she was almost too tired to live; yet she could not bring herself to the decision to go home. She had determined to see the war out, to a finish: moreover, if she went home, she would feel that she was losing her one slim miraculous chance of finding her husband. She had had no news and could still believe him to be alive.

Beneath her feet, the strange desert rolled away

to a hard horizon. As far as she could see, armies were camping. William was there perhaps, somewhere. She shaded her eyes, staring north to the English lines, and as she looked, carried to her on the wind, came the sound of fifes playing. A British regiment was marching, somewhere, hidden within a fold of the hills.

No, she would not go home. Since she had no place to go, and they did not want her to stay though Mademoiselle de Vaumont had stated the contrary, she must go where she was sent. After all, it didn't matter where, she was always alone, wherever she was.

She stumbled wearily down the hill, past the remains of old abandoned trenches and tangles of barbed wire. Another attack was preparing. There would be a new rush of work the next day; she would wait for that and then ask for her transfer.

At the door of the nurses' hut, an English officer was waiting. He advanced toward her, and said in very quaint French: "Est Madame Chudd lá?"

"Jimmy!" she cried, running forward.

"Helen!" he shouted.

They stood clinging to each other's hands, devouring the sight of each other.

"I didn't recognize you — Jove, how good it is to see you."

"Jimmy, Jimmy," was all she could say.

His round pink face grinned at her from under his round tin hat. He was all round like a bundle in

his rough coat. He looked like a disreputable cupid who had started out for the North pole.

"He knows something about William," she said to herself, but she dared not ask. Scarcely dared she formulate the question in her own mind. She had a feeling of giddiness; his face swam before her eyes.

"There's no place to receive you, but the popotte," she stammered and then noticed that his eyes like her own were suspiciously wet. "But why does he feel like crying?" she wondered.

She led him into the hut. There was no one there. Soiled tea-cups and crusts of bread covered the bare table.

They sat down by the stove, stretching out their muddy boots to it.

"Shall I make you some tea?" she asked.

"No, thanks; I've such a few minutes. My general gave me a lift. He'll be back to pick me up at any moment. There is so much to say—" He paused.

"Yes," she faltered, and then, neither spoke.

She felt his eyes on her face. She was afraid to read what was written on his.

"You limp," she said at last.

"It's nothing, a flesh wound. I was laid up a week or two, I'm just back from the base. Awfully bad luck being out of it, for such a trifle."

"You — you don't like it, do you, up there, here, wherever you are?"

"I hate it."

"Poor Jimmy."

"One's so awfully afraid."

"I don't believe you."

"Oh, but I am, I'm afraid all the time. I'm afraid of *it*, and I'm afraid of being afraid. You can't let your fellows know how scared you are, you know, you can't let them down. That would be worse than anything. That's what keeps you going. They depend on you." He paused. "The mud is bad; five of my men were drowned in it the other night. They fell into a shell hole in the dark and were sucked down.

She shuddered; a deadly feeling of sickness filled her. Was he preparing her for bad news, the worst news? — She closed her eyes.

"You are so changed, I didn't recognize you," she heard him saying. "It's awful your being like this; you must have lost two stone; you ought to go home."

"Home?" she echoed.

"You look as if you were dying by inches," he muttered.

"Oh, no," she responded quickly, "I'm not, I'm living by inches."

"You're killing yourself in this place."

"No, I like the place."

"But I can see it; your face, it's all gone."

"Yes, I suppose it is; I hadn't noticed. Is it so ugly?" She tried to smile, looking at him, but her mouth trembled queerly, and at the sight of his

kind funny features working so painfully, his eyebrows chasing each other up and down his forehead, his hand rumpling his troubled head, she broke down.

"Tell me, tell me," she whispered huskily, "have you any news? Have you seen him?"

"Yes, I saw him yesterday."

She grew suddenly very still. "Where?" she asked.

"In a dug out."

"Near here?"

"About twenty miles away."

"Oh, my God! Oh, my God!" she whispered and began to silently weep.

Jimmy sat watching her, huddled over the stove. His eyes dwelt on her miserably; he seemed to be struggling with some difficult and serious problem. His eyebrows were distracted. He watched wonderingly the lines in her face, the twisting creases of her pale weeping mouth, the convulsing contractions of the chords in her thin throat.

He put out a hand and patted her shoulder. The tears streamed silently down her face. He gave her his handkerchief; he was very miserable; he was glad when she blew her nose. That silent white weeping was awful. And yet somehow, it didn't seem to be hurting her. It was as if it were a relief. She fumbled for his hand that was on her shoulder and clutched his fingers. Her unseeing eyes stared before her. Her breath still came trembling from

her thin bosom. How thin she was, how thin! She looked as if she was hollowed out inside, just a brittle shell. Jimmy groaned.

She looked at him, startled by the groan.

"What was he doing when you saw him?" she asked.

"He was eating his dinner."

"What was his dinner?"

"Bully beef and bread and cheese and beer."

"Was it good cheese?"

"Yes, Stilton."

"What kind of beer?"

"Pale, I think, in a mug."

"Oh, a mug, what kind of a mug?"

"A tin mug."

"Was he alone?"

"Yes, I met his corporal outside, he told me where to find him."

"What's he himself?"

"He is a colour sergeant."

"He's been promoted then?"

"Yes."

"I'm so glad," she said.

Jimmy's face flushed crimson. He was not subtle was Jimmy, but the pathos of her sigh of pride reached him straight enough. He remembered William's triumphs in the old days.

"It's something to rise from the ranks to be a sergeant, isn't it?" she was saying.

"Rather," he agreed; "it's splendid."

"Yes, it's splendid."

They looked at each other, she caught her breath. Suddenly they both laughed, a little timidly.

Jimmy didn't know that it was almost the first time she had laughed in two years, but an enormous relief welled up in his heart. He did not analyze the exultancy that grew in him from that moment. He just let it grow.

"Tell me exactly what he looks like," she demanded giving a last blow to her nose and returning him his handkerchief.

"He looks like a first class colour sergeant."

"Only bigger than most," she added.

"Yes, bigger, oh, very big of course, but thin."

"Thin? What do you mean? William couldn't be thin." She was greatly troubled.

"Well, I mean thin for him. His face, it's a different shape; hard and a brownish colour."

"Oh, dark?"

"Weatherbeaten, you know."

"You don't mean his expression is hard?"

"No, I should say his expression was jolly."

"Jolly?" she cried her question.

"Yes, he grinned when I stuck my head in, and —"

"And?"

"And said — I don't know if I ought to tell you what he said."

"But you must."

"He said: 'Come in out of my light damn you, and don't think I'm going to stand at attention.'"

"Oh, and what then?"

"Then he gave me some of his bread and cheese."

"I see," she paused. "He is happy," she announced strangely, as if to herself.

And because Jimmy was not subtle he said: "He's awfully fit. He's enjoying himself, he loves it. Everything that I hate is the breath of life to him."

"You mean he enjoys the fighting?"

"Yes, his captain told me afterwards that he was a terror. Sees red. No holding him. In a bayonet charge, he's everywhere, a wonder. Gets them, one after another, spinning on his spike."

"Oh!" She covered her face with her hands. Jimmy cocked an eyebrow at her. He didn't know what it meant, her hiding her face. Perhaps he oughtn't to have told her that.

"He's got the D. C. M. you know," he said hurriedly.

She lifted her face, flushed and excited.

"Ah, tell me. How did he get it?"

"He wouldn't tell me. I dragged out of him something about getting the fellows together during a scrap, when all the officers were down and out."

"He took command you mean?"

"Yes, of the company, what was left of it."

"He's seen hard fighting then?"

"The hardest; been in all the nastiest places."

"Where?"

"In Belgium, Ypres salient, Loos, Armentières, Neuve Chapelle."

She clasped her hands round her knees.

"They might have made him an officer after all that, it seems to me," she brought out.

Jimmy grinned.

"It's the least they could do," she reiterated with a show of anger. "Why don't they? What's the matter with them?"

"I rather think it's that he doesn't want to be made one."

"You mean he refuses?"

"Yes. Oh, it's all right. They leave him alone, and that's what he wants."

She took this in silence. Her face that had grown animated, drooped again. She knit her fingers together, straining them. Once she started to speak, but closed her lips over a deep breath.

It had grown dark in the bare room. The glow of the red coals in the stove showed them to each other dimly. Outside, the wind had risen, and on its wailing wings, the noises of the war came flying by. The growl of the cannon had gained in volume. The pulse of the roaring giant beat faster and faster.

"It must be cold, up there," she said at last.

"Beastly cold at night."

"How the earth shakes. I suppose the artillery is preparing another attack."

He did not answer, for he knew, it was useless telling her, what awaited him at dawn.

An orderly's voice told them that an English general was waiting at the gate for Monsieur le Capitaine.

They stood up in the gloom of the uncertain shel-

ter of creaking boards and rattling windows."

"I must be off," he said.

"I'll go to the gate with you," she replied.

Her nervousness was intense. His departure seemed to her terrible and final. She had suddenly a conviction that she would never see him again and she was aware all at once of the wonderful unselfishness of his friendship.

She realized that he was the one being in the world now who provided a link between her husband and herself. His faithfulness to them both was her one hope, and for two years her hope had been centred upon him. If anything happened to him, she felt that she would be lost.

They went out into the windy dark, figures with lanterns moved in the wide blackness. To the West, red flashes were running along the sky line.

She could not let him go without asking him the question that tortured her life. They neared the gate.

"Jimmy, if he had spoken of me, you would have told me, wouldn't you?"

His voice came to her on the wind.

"Yes, dear, I would have told you."

A load like a weight of lead fell on her heart that had been almost glad, for an hour.

Jimmy was going forever perhaps and nothing was done, she was no nearer her goal. Her salvation was slipping away from her. As those flashes disappeared, running into the dark, so the gleam of her hope would be extinguished.

"Jimmy, I want you to know that I was never unfaithful to William, I meant to be, I left him, but I did not see the man whom I went to see in Paris. I thought before then that I loved him; I found out in Paris, alone, that it was all a lie. He was brought here wounded, a hero, I did not care, I had known for a long time that I had never loved him. I love William, I know it, I swear it on the heads of every man that is going into battle. I am waiting for him to come back to me. If ever again you see him, I want you to tell him what I've told you, you must not refuse me."

They had reached the gate. The guard's lantern lit up his face with the ugly chin strap holding his tin hat on his poor funny round head. His great coat was buttoned up high; he had not the slightest resemblance to the Jimmy she used to know. To her, he resembled all the other men in the world who were going to die, in the clamorous obliterating dark of the war.

He took her hands. "I promise," he said, "if I have a chance. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Jimmy."

"Good-bye, dear." He had always loved her; he wanted her to be happy; he left her standing in the mud. She saw him climb into the car. It moved with a grinding of brakes and was swallowed up in the dark.

And so Jimmy went back to the place where a laugh like his was worth all of Lady Peggy's wonderful pearls, and where the rough khaki figures in

tin hats and monstrous boots called him "H'our h'own little orficer" and followed his walking stick over the parapet as if it were a fairy godmother's wand. For Jimmy forgot to be scared when the time came to run away next morning, and if he felt solemn and a little light in the stomach as he watched the minute hand on his wrist watch near the destined instant of the dawn when they were to go out across the open, he said to himself: "These fellows are depending on you, old man, you know, and if you let them down, God won't help you." And no one knew that he was afraid and those who saw him fall, said there was a smile on his face and that he was running forward, his arm lifted.

He was carried in to the field ambulance that evening, very white and very weak, and all he said was: "Keep me alive here for two days, Doctor, I've got a message to deliver, there'll be just time."

The thread of Jimmy's life was very thin now. It was spinning itself out to the end, but it held together two people in the world whom he loved the most, all the same.

VI

NO one had a very clear idea of what hour of the night it was that it began, or of where the first bomb dropped, or of how many bombs did actually burst in the precincts of the Hospital, until it was all over and the sun had risen on the horrid sight and the Médecin Chef had taken stock of the damage. Four supply huts had been hit squarely and reduced to scrap wood. Half a dozen others, two of them wards full of wounded, had rents in them or parts of roof torn off. The block of buildings making up the operating rooms and receiving hut, had caught fire and by morning were burned to the ground. Mrs. Chudd had been hit by a bullet out in the open, where with her orderlies she had carried the wounded from her burning shed.

The German aviator had flown down within two hundred yards of the earth, and by the light of the flames had turned his machine gun onto the wounded men that were spread helpless over the ground. Mrs. Chudd leaning over a dying man had been shot through the back. It was discovered in the dispensary where she was eventually carried and put on a table, that beside this bullet wound, her hands and ankles had been badly burnt, her clothes black with smoke had large holes scorched in them. (She

had, as her orderlies said, been in and out of the burning shed innumerable times.) It was evident to Monsieur Groult that she had gone on carrying stretchers for an hour or more, with her burnt hands.

The priest, Remenez, and his band of old men, hung miserably outside the door of the office where their infirmière was lying unconscious. It was no good driving them away, they came back like unhappy dogs to wait, with their old shaggy-browed eyes fixed on the door. This was at sunrise, long after the bombing had ceased and the wounded had been housed again in other undamaged huts.

" She kept us at it," they muttered. " It's our sister that's wounded. God curse the soul of that German to hell. She told us what to do and we did it; she'd make a good general."

" Mother of God, if you'd heard her calling out through the smoke and the noise of bombs bursting, you'd have obeyed her. " Now then," she said, " one stretcher at a time and no pushing. The ones farthest from the door first."

You see," and an old greybeard wagged his head wisely, " she knew that if the roof fell the ones near the door could crawl out. And each time she came back she went to the farthest end and took a stretcher with one of us."

" Bien mon vieux, she wouldn't let me do anything but put wet clothes on their faces. She gave me a pail and a bundle of rags and told me to go up and down sousing 'em."

" Did you see the devil? I saw him, as clear as a

spider in a chimney. He'd thrown all his bombs. He swooped down like that, and turned his mitrailleuse on them. They were lying there on the ground. Where else could we take 'em? We'd no time. We'd just got the last ones out when the roof went. Easy mark, he thought — God — Boche — and he poured lead into them lying there on their backs looking up at him. The sister was on her knees on the ground bandaging, a hemorrhage she had said — she asked me to help, her hands were clumsy she said, and she fell forward on her face across the man who was dying. I gave a shout when I saw her. The sister! I shouted. We picked her up, she was game, was our lady; she said: "Don't take on, old one, it's nothing."

"We've worked with her a long time now."

"She worked just like one of us."

"She was never tired was our sister."

"We called her our lady, because she was always with us, and said she belonged to us for the war."

In the improvised operating room Monsieur Groult worked swiftly. Now and then he spoke, he who was always so silent and serene, and now and then he gave a sharp exclamation of pity.

"My God, look at these hands, there is no flesh left on their palms."

"The ankles are not so bad."

"Gently, Mademoiselle, we must lay her on her face."

Mademoiselle de Vaumont helped him turn the white body, tears streaming down her face.

"The bullet has not, I believe, touched the spine. Back again. Lay her on her back. There it is, I can feel it, under the breast. Impossible to operate here. The X-ray is destroyed. She must be rested, and stimulated and taken into Amiens, I will operate tomorrow.

The news spread through the Hospital that Madame Chudd was being evacuated by ambulance to the base. The Médecin Chef was heard shouting over the telephone to the Inspector General:

"An infirmière seriously wounded. Monsieur Groult asks that a bed be prepared in Stationary Hospital No. 10. She will be accompanied by a nurse and doctor. Monsieur Groult assumes responsibility. Impossible to operate here. I am waiting for that sanitary train I asked for. Shall evacuate all wounded. Those who cannot go by train, in ambulances. Morale of patients fairly good. Eleven deaths among wounded. Six orderlies injured. No casualties among officers."

In the officer's ward the Princess looking as if she had been saved from a wreck at sea sat beside her son's bed. One of the nurse's old blue cloaks was buttoned up under her chin. Her face was livid with fatigue, her white hair hung down in wisps under the black handkerchief she had wound hastily round her head. Her eyes closed, her hands crossed on her stick, she listened to the officers in their beds, talking excitedly.

"It appears there were thirteen bombs."

"This is how the Germans avenge themselves for losing a battle."

An aviator with his leg in plaster was beside himself with excitement.

"Name of God, if I don't show those devils something when I get out of this bed."

"Nothing is bad enough for the swine."

"All the same it wasn't very gay here, lying tied to one's bed."

"Sapristi; I thought we were done for at one time; didn't you? When all those stones and lumps rattled on the roof?"

"The orderly was saying his prayers under the table, did you see him?"

Suzanne de St. Germain, the nurse, moved briskly about straightening bed clothes. Her face was pale, her cap awry, but she laughed cheerfully. She had not left the ward all night.

"I said a few prayers myself," she remarked.

"Ah Madame, you were épatante," they cried in chorus.

The Princess heard some one talking at the other door of the ward. She caught the words: "Madame Chudd shot through the back." She made a gesture with her cane to silence the speakers. Too late, Jocelyn had started up on his pillow.

"What's that? What's that?"

"Nothing, dear; nothing."

"But I heard them, I heard Madame Chudd's name. What is it? I say—"

The Princess laid a strong hand on his shoulder forcing him down on his pillow.

"Your friend has been wounded," she said grimly. "Keep quiet and I will tell you."

"Good God, wounded! How? When? — But I thought you said, she took you down into the dug out?"

"So she did."

"And stayed there?"

"No, I didn't say she stayed there. She left me almost at once, and said she would come back when the danger was over. Your sister went with her. It was Yvonne that came back to get me. Yvonne said that Madame Chudd had told her if she wanted to be useful to go into one of the wards and keep the men quiet, so she went. Yvonne didn't see her again. She stayed in the ward, I don't know which one, till it began to get light, then she came to see how I was. I was all right, I had plenty of company. They brought wounded down there as many as it would hold."

"Yes, yes; it must have been trying for you; but what about Hélène?"

"It seems she was wounded outside, by a machine gun bullet. They all say, she behaved very well, quite extraordinarily well. Yvonne said she could see the flames from the window."

"What flames?"

"The hut, what is it, it's called the 'salle d'attente,' caught on fire. It seems it was Madame Chudd's hut, her service."

"Yes, yes."

"She got out all the wounded before the roof fell in."

"Ah!"

"As I have told you, she behaved with great courage."

"But how is she? Is it serious?"

"I don't know."

"You must find out."

"I can't bother them now; we must just wait. No one wants an old woman fussing around at such a time." The Princess's voice quavered. "I could do nothing," she muttered bitterly, "I and my stick, nothing but give a few drinks down there in that hole and tell them stories. I'm too old to be any use. I stayed down there to be out of the way."

"Dear mother, I know you're as brave as any of them."

"Brave? I don't know about that; I was frightened enough at first, when half the window and most of the shelves fell on me in bed; I couldn't move."

"Then how did you get out?"

"She appeared suddenly, swept the debris on to the floor, pulled me out of bed, put my coat on me and said to me as if I'd been a bad child: "Come along quick, I've no time to waste."

"Helen?"

"Yes."

"Well, mother?"

They looked at each other. "Well," she said

grimly, " there you are, I was mistaken; I admit my mistake."

The Médecin Chef came in then with the corps Commander. The officers were all to go off that morning. Monsieur Groult was too busy to come, but had sent word that it was safe for Monsieur de St. Christe to go on the train to Paris.

It was by then seven o'clock. Their infirmière had prepared hot coffee for them all. The General and the Princess and the Médecin Chef drank together out of tin cups. Everyone was conscious of the pleasantness of being alive. The General congratulated the ward on its excellent morale. He drank to the health of the Princess who though not a soldier and no longer young, had stood the ordeal of the dreadful night with such courage and sang-froid. He hoped that the cowardly villain who had committed the dastardly crime would meet with his deserts.

He regretted deeply the terrible misfortune that had befallen one of the brave women who had devoted themselves to the wounded. He must leave them now to give Madame Chudd the Croix de Guerre that she deserved as much as any soldier in the French Army.

" Hear, hear! "

" We'll avenge her! " cried the officers from their pillows.

Jocelyn de St. Christe lay very still in his bed, his eyes closed.

Helen had regained consciousness when the Méd-

ecin Chef ushered the General into the pharmacy. She lay on the table, wrapped in a blanket on which rested her bandaged hands. Her face was white as wax. One of her long golden braids dangled down to the floor. She opened her eyes at the entrance of the General. Mademoiselle de Vaumont leaning down spoke to her softly, but she did not seem to understand. The General stood at the foot of the table on which she was lying. He drew his sword from its scabbard and saluted the prostrate woman. "In the name of the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies and on behalf of the officers and soldiers of France, I decorate you with the Croix de Guerre in testimony of the great bravery and devotion you have shown always, and especially this night to the poilus of France." The great soldier's voice faltered; he sheathed his sword and coming nearer pinned the bronze medal with its green ribbon on the grey blanket. Then he kissed the white forehead, and went out. Helen looked from one to another. Mademoiselle de Vaumont was there and Monsieur Groult, and beyond the door she saw for a moment a group of shaggy heads, but she seemed to be looking for some one who was not there.

"I do not understand," she murmured "I am very tired. I wish William would come." She closed her eyes.

At noon they took her away in an ambulance. Mademoiselle de Vaumont and a doctor went with her. All the nurses were at the gate to watch her

go, but she did not know they were there to wave good-bye.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon of the same day that an English soldier came in at the gate and asked if there was a nurse there named Madame Chudd. He was a big man and he seemed to have walked a long way for he was covered with mud.

The sentry at the gate didn't understand what he was saying and pointed to the Médecin Chef's office.

"Eh, what? An English sergeant? I've no time to talk to him. What does he want? Asking for Madame Chudd, is he? Tell him she's gone." The Médecin Chef bent again over his desk.

The administration officer went out into the wind, where the soldier was waiting. It had begun to rain.

"Madame Chudd has gone," he announced abruptly.

The man looked at him strangely.

"Gone?" he echoed.

"Yes, gone; I say; she was evacuated at noon. We had a raid last night. She was wounded."

"Wounded?"

"Yes, wounded."

The Englishman lurched forward.

"How wounded?"

"In the back, machine bullet."

"Dead, you mean? Dead?"

"No, not dead, I tell you, evacuated."

The great rough figure in its muddy clothes

stood hanging forward as if it were going to fall. The head was bent. The man seemed stunned, or perhaps only very stupid and tired. When he lifted his head and spoke at last, it was in a kind of dull apology.

"I am a relative of Madame Chudd's, sir," he said. "I should be grateful to you if you would tell me where she has gone."

"Stationary hospital, No. 9, Amiens."

"Thank you."

The administration officer who was a small man but very dapper looked over the muddy giant coldly, from the top of the wooden steps, then went into the hut, and slammed the door.

The soldier stood a while in the rain staring at the closed door, then turned and made for the gate with long heavy steps. It was growing dark as he turned off up the road toward the British lines.

VII

LADY SIDLINGTON had found it not quite so easy to deal with soldiers in the war zone as it had been to deal with politicians in England. Statesmen in her experience had liked to have their work interfered with. Soldiers did not. Generals were stern beings who did not encourage visits to their headquarters. She forgave them, and protested that even though they made the mistake of not taking her seriously, she did so take them. It had been a disappointment to her, to find that she was allowed to suffer no hardship or discomfort or danger. She had settled her staff in a hotel and herself next door to it in a villa by the sea. This was not at all what she had expected to find at the war. Her camp bed and woollen pyjamas were useless, and it seemed to her for a time that she herself was more so than anyone, but she had ended by settling down to it. There was after all plenty of work to do and all the men in the world came to drink tea and console her. Even the Generals were kind to her, so long as she and her motor kept within the limits their Provost Marshal had set her. Being near an important base, had too, its advantages. The very nicest man in the world who by now was commanding a Division was able to come there once in a while.

He was actually sitting in the drawing room of the villa, eating poached eggs on toast and drinking tea at four in the afternoon, and looking quite dreadfully tired, having come out of the line only ten days before after a fortnight of the very worst, when she was handed the telegram from Amiens. It said that Madame Chudd was seriously wounded in Stationary Hospital No. 9, Amiens and desired her presence, and it was signed Médecin Chef.

Peggy Sidlington turned white.

"I must go at once."

The nicest man in the world said:

"Yes, of course," and looked wistful.

"You must go and get me a motor pass while I pack."

The nicest man who was really very tired, said: "Right ho!" and looked bored.

"You wouldn't have me sit here with you when Helen may be dying, would you?"

"No, of course not."

"Then don't look like that."

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to."

"That's a darling. A blue pass to Amiens, shortest route. I'll be ready in half an hour."

"But you can't get there to-night; it'll be dark in another hour."

Peggy's eyes widened from the doorway.

"Have you never motored in the dark?"

The divisional general smiled:

"Well, yes, I have once or twice."

"Then I don't see why I shouldn't," and she left him.

The man adored her. Humbly he came back with the pass in forty minutes. She was waiting for him on the steps of the villa, giving final instructions to Mary Bridge and the surgeons and the matron. He tucked the rugs round her feet and leaned a moment on the door of the car. His eyes were faithful and humble and rather sad. He was wondering whether if he lived through the fighting she wouldn't some day break his heart and whether actually, he was ever going to see her again.

"I go back to-morrow, you know, Peggy; I only had twenty four hours."

"Poor Bumps!" He was not known in his division as Bumps. "I hate leaving you, but I know what Helen would do for me if I was in trouble, and it's not as if she had any one else."

The man's face lightened. Perhaps he might live. Possibly she wouldn't break his heart.

"Good-bye, dear."

"Good-bye."

The motor with the red crosses on its doors and the pretty lady inside and the big police dog outside, whirled away.

She arrived at Amiens at midnight. It took her an hour to find the hospital. She went to several others by mistake. A number of soldiers with lanterns showed her the way out of one dismal street into another. At last, a heavy eyed orderly in a stifling office told her that she had arrived at her

destination and that he would see if the Médecin de garde could be disturbed. A large woman with a pale crooked face and clumsy feet came down the long corridor and greeted her with a singularly sweet smile.

"Are you the Countess of Sidlington?"

"Yes."

"Madame Chudd is sleeping. She was operated upon yesterday."

"Is she in danger?"

"I believe not, but we are not sure of the left lung."

Peggy Sidlington's face quivered.

"Poor Helen, poor, poor Helen!" she whispered.

"If you will come with me I will tell you, while you eat something. I will make chocolate or bouillon. Then you must sleep. There is a couch in the major's office. To-morrow we will find you a room. Your friend will be so happy to have one of her own with her. I do not know her family, I did not know whom to write to; you will be able to do that now; I am very relieved, very glad. It has been a great responsibility for us. She seemed so isolated, so solitary. She spoke of no one. Her mother? Her father? Her husband perhaps? I did not know what to do. My name is Henriette de Vaumont. I was in the hospital with your friend. I love her; I owe her a great deal. She is the bravest person I have ever known."

The Frenchwoman led the way down the dim

stone flagged corridor and opened a door, bearing an enamelled plate with the words: Médecin Major —K— — Bureau.

"We are visitors here," she said. "The assistant surgeon has given me his rooms. Every hospital in Amiens is full of wounded. It was impossible to put your friend in a ward full of men."

On a table was a shaded lamp, a tray with plates, cups and saucers. An open door led to an inner room.

"Would you like to see her? Be very quiet; she must not be disturbed, sleep is precious for her now."

A night light was burning beside the narrow bed. Helen was breathing peacefully. Her arms ending in two great gloves of cotton wool, lay on the coverlet. Her face was an ivory mask.

The two women stood together looking down on her, in silence. As they watched, the pale blueish lips moved, and a faint sound, more like a sigh than a groan issued from the still body.

Mademoiselle de Vaumont laid her fingers on the arm above the bandaged hand, and nodded her head satisfied.

"Her pulse is good," she whispered.

Lady Sidlington's face was wet with tears when she turned back to the outer room.

"Tell me, everything," she said.

And Mademoiselle de Vaumont told her. When her story was ended, she paused. "I believe," she said timidly, "that she wanted to write — a note,

before the operation. But she could not use her hands. There seemed to be something grievous on her mind. At the very last, in the operating room, just before they gave her the anæsthetic, she motioned to me to lean down to her and whispered: 'If I do not come back, say to Lady Sidlington that she must tell William I was thinking of him "all the time."' Then she let them put the ether masque on her face."

"William is her husband," said Lady Sidlington.

"Ah, I see, I understand."

It was three days later that a letter for Madame Chudd was brought to the Hospital from the office of the A. P. M. of the British troops in Amiens. Lady Sidlington recognising the handwriting was frightened. Helen was still very weak. She seemed to be sleeping when Lady Sidlington entered, but she said without opening her eyes:

"Is that you, Peggy?"

"Yes, darling, I have a letter for you."

"A letter?"

"Yes, look." "Happiness never yet killed any one," Peggy said to herself in a panic, holding the envelope before the helpless woman's eyes. But the sudden light on the pale face was too much for her. She felt the two incapable bandaged hands fold over the little square of paper, and turning abruptly, left the room. "There are some things, one has no right to look at," she muttered blowing her nose beyond the door.

A few moments later a voice called her.

"Peggy!"

"Yes?"

"Come back!"

She obeyed. The letter was still lying against the thin breast under the crossed, bandaged hands.

"I can't open it, you'll have to. There, hold it for me to read."

Peggy held the sheet of paper, her eyes averted. She remembered William and Helen together, as they used to be in the old days. "God help them, and bring them home together," she breathed.

"Jimmy is dead," she heard Helen say.

Peggy dropped to her knees.

"Jimmy! Not Jimmy," she echoed.

"Yes, Jimmy. He sent for William before he died, William says. He died like a gallant gentleman and a true friend. He sent for William to give him my message."

"And William? Where is he?"

"I don't know. It seems he walked over to the hospital the day I was wounded, and was told I had gone."

"Is he coming here?"

"If he can, but his battalion goes into the line to-morrow, that is to-day, for eight days."

"Only another eight days to wait, dear."

"Yes, if —"

"And you know now that he knows."

"Yes, he knows, because Jimmy told him before he died."

"Poor Jimmy! Poor Jimmy!"

"We'll never hear him laugh again."

"And never see his kind baby face."

"Do you remember his white spats and red carnation?"

"He loved William, I knew he would save us."

"He loved you both."

"William walked to the hospital, to find I was gone. Perhaps they didn't know who he was. Perhaps they turned him away. He must have been tired and hungry. Perhaps they gave him tea. I wonder where he is now. May be — May be — If he were — If anything happened now — —"

"Nothing will happen, darling."

"But it does, always, every one is killed, sooner or later. Who would have thought Jimmy? All the finest are killed, you know that."

"Yes, I know," said Peggy.

"Peggy."

"Helen! . . ."

"We're helpless, we can't do anything."

"We can't even pray."

They clung to one another.

After a long silence, Helen said:

"Jimmy saved me in Paris two years ago."

"Saved you?"

"Yes, I was going out of my mind. He found me on the street, very early one morning. He took me into his car; I would have — I don't know what would have happened."

"You were so unhappy?"

"Yes, I must have been, because I nearly went mad. Jocelyn de St. Christe had thrown me over."

"How do you mean?"

"I had gone to meet him, he refused to see me. It all seems very unreal now, but I've been paying for it ever since. I wonder if I have paid enough, I wonder if William can — ever feel the same. His letter is kind, but I am not sure. Can I ever undo what I have done, do you think?"

"When he sees you as you are now —"

"Ah, but it won't be enough for him to be just sorry for me, it won't be enough for him, I mean, I am thinking of the future, if the war ever ends —"

"Trust him."

"I do, but I have no right to."

"Jimmy thought so."

"But Jimmy never did any man or woman the slightest harm."

That afternoon a motor ambulance came to take Mademoiselle de Vaumont back to the hospital. Helen whispered to her, as she leaned over to kiss her good-bye:

"I have heard from my husband, for the first time in two years. He is coming to see me, in eight days; I am so happy."

But when the eight days were up, he didn't come. The ninth day and the tenth day, they waited full of hope. They would start at the sound of footsteps in the corridor, Peggy would go to the door and look. No one came. Twelve days passed, thirteen days, fourteen days, he didn't come.

Helen did not speak of him any more. Her eyes looked like the eyes of a hunted animal caught in a trap. Peggy could bear it no longer. She paid a visit to the A. P. M. Telephones carried along the British zone the request for news of William B. Chudd, Sergeant Major, 5th Battallion of the — — The reply came from Army headquarters: "Reported missing." Peggy white to the lips told the truth.

"We need not wait here any longer," was all that Helen said.

Monsieur Groult arranged for them to go to Paris. In another month, he would come to see them there. He advised the South of France. The lung had been grazed. There would be a weakness there for a long time.

Peggy said in Paris: "I shall not leave you; Mary Bridge will run my show."

"But Peggy —"

"Am I your friend or am I not?"

"You are indeed."

"Then there's no more to be said."

They had become, both of them, stoical women of few words. Distraction was no antidote for Helen now; they did not try to deceive each other.

A week had gone by in Paris when the news came that William Chudd was a prisoner of war.

And then it was Peggy that broke down.

Helen simply began to breathe again. "I can wait," she said. "He is alive, he will come back."

PART FIVE

PART V

I

THE war was over, the armistice had been signed, Paris had been celebrating for a fortnight. The captured German guns massed round the Place de le Concorde looked already like relics of a past age. From the coast of Belgium to the Adriatic Sea, men had stopped killing one another. At eleven o'clock on the morning of the 11th of November, they had stopped. On the tick of the clock, the advancing armies of France, of Great Britain, of America and of Italy, had been pulled up and brought to a stand still. The guns were silenced. The ruined earth lay serene and horrible, testifying mutely to the Heavens.

Alsace Lorraine was in gala attire. Marshal Foch had made a triumphal entry into the city of Strasbourg and had reviewed the soldiers of France before the Palace of the Kaiser, and, a mile away, from the other side of a dismal river, a strange procession was moving along the road. They came on foot across the Bridge of Kiel, starving men, in strange rags, with hollow cheeks, and haunted feverish eyes. And they penetrated like ghosts into the throng of merry makers. They were prisoners of war coming home. There was no one to meet them and no one to show them the way. Step-

ping onto the soil of France they did not seem to know where they were. Strange homecoming for innocent men who had been in prison for so long. They seemed to have been forgotten; no one recognized them. Freedom appeared before them shrouded in bewilderment and weariness. Some of them were British; they had still a long way to go. They moved on doggedly. Their walking was not so very different from the marching they had done in a distant time when they were going up to the trenches, but it was feebler. They vacillated on the long crowded way. There was no one to command them or guide them. They were guided only by a desperate longing that seemed to elude them on the very threshold of its fulfilment. They did not look like heroes. No one crowned them with flowers or lifted them up on acclaiming arms. They were covered with dust and very much fatigued, yet they were heroes.

Three days later in Paris, in the lounge of the Ritz Hotel a British general with an empty sleeve, tucked up neatly over the stump of his arm, was talking to a silvery headed diplomat with a rosy face — the diplomat was smoking a cigarette, and sipping a glass of Cognac and saying:

"You soldiers have won the war. Now it's our turn — you're not needed any more."

The general did not reply — he knew it was true, and he was wondering what he would do now. He was forty-five years old. He had lost his right arm. He was very tired. War had left marks

upon his face. The shadow of a deep eternal horror was in his eyes.

He had come to Paris to find out whether Lady Peggy still thought him the nicest man in the world. If she did, he would be able to face the problem of a future without an occupation. She had told him she would dine with him at the Ritz, and he had expected to find her alone, but her flower-like face with its shining blue eyes smiled at him sweetly from the center of a group of diplomats and politicians. They were a merry party. They had talked wittily of the dangers of peace and eaten expensive foods with an indifferent greediness that had left him gaping.

Peace! He thought of it as it had appeared to them all out there in the seething mud of battlefields, a being of supreme beauty and simplicity, bringing healing and quiet and repose and relief from fear. With what unutterable longing they had fought for it. How many thousands of them had died for it. He looked wearily round the crowded dining room. Women with bare shoulders and impudent eyes stared at him curiously, scrutinizing languidly the coloured ribbon on his coat and the empty socket of his sleeve. The chattering of many voices rattled in his ears.

"Believe me, old chap," said one of Peggy's guests to another, "the Germans won't sign the kind of peace we want. They don't think they're beaten. If we had pushed on with that last attack in Alsace — but as it is — we've gained nothing."

He groaned — his head swam — he felt obscurely that he was the victim of a monstrous deception.

Beyond the many shining heads and white shoulders, past the pink and red and congested grimacing faces, he saw out in the dark a black field with innumerable wooden crosses sticking up out of the ground.

Peggy's favourite politician was picking his teeth and saying:

"Yes, that poor fellow Jim Gower was killed in 1916."

But a gay voice broke in at another table.

"How amusing it will be, if the conference is in Paris. Everyone in the world will be here."

And some one else.

"Yes, labour is going to be a great nuisance. I don't know what the country is coming to. Capital, my dear man, Capital can never survive Ruin — it's Ruin — the P. M. is too soft with these chaps."

They filed out of the dining room — a very handsome French officer in a sky blue tunic, approached Lady Sidlington.

"Bonjour, Madame."

"Bonjour."

"May I be permitted to ask for news of Madame Chudd? Is she well? Quite recovered? My mother often asks —"

"Quite well, thank you." Peggy's voice was

cool and sweet and chilling. "She is here with me."

"Here?" The handsome officer looked about him.

"Staying here, I mean; she has gone to meet her husband at Nancy—"

"Ah, I see."

"He was evacuated there, from Germany."

"From Germany? Ah yes, I have heard, he was a prisoner."

"Exactly."

"Present, I beg you, my hommages to Madame Chudd."

"I will do so."

"Good-evening, Madame."

"Good-evening."

The Frenchman moved away. He was seen to join a group of men round a red haired woman in black.

"Who is your handsome friend, Peggy?"

"The Comte de St. Christe."

"What a lot of medals he has!" Three palms to his Croix de Guerre."

"I don't know, has he, he's not very interesting."

"So William Chudd is coming home at last," said the nicest man in the world.

"Yes, at last."

The wonderful old diplomat with the silvery head that had charmed a hemisphere for half a century, took a leisurely pull of his cigar.

"Let me see," he murmured. "William Chudd? Do I remember William Chudd? I

seem to, and yet I seem not to. Which is it, Peggy my child, do I, or don't I?"

"You do, or at any rate you ought to. You used to see a lot of him, at one time; you called him the Mandarin."

"Ah, yes, it comes back to me, a big man, fat, with a white face and curious eyes, rather Mongolian, quite distinctly Mongolian, Arkwright's mysterious friend, socialist, good head for figures; small voice in a large chest. Passive resister. Dead weight to move. Handsome wife, who didn't like me. Of course; what's he been up to? Got interned in Germany?"

"No," snapped Peggy, "he enlisted as a private."

"How very curious."

"And was taken prisoner."

"You don't say so!

"He might have been in Mr. Asquith's Cabinet."

"God bless my soul!"

"But he preferred to fight for his country."

"And quite right too, excellent choice." The old gentleman yawned, delicately.

Peggy was flushed, her eyes blazed.

"You're an inhuman old thing."

"Why my dear? Why?"

"You ought to admire him, and do something to make it up to him — help him to take up again the old life."

"Ah, I see, you want him back in politics."

"Politics — I don't care that for Politics but I

want his old colleagues to help him to a normal life again, and give him a welcome — worthy of him."

"I'm afraid my child that you are rather romantic. The war forms a hiatus in such lives, nothing more. Nothing a man has done in the war, will be of any use to him now. Soldiering, unfortunately, merely unfits a man for living. Chudd has no doubt lost his aptitude for public affairs. You say he is a hero. Ah well. Heroes are at a discount now. And heroism is not exactly a profession." But Peggy was no longer listening. She had risen to her feet and was staring with parted lips down the long corridor over the heads of the gay crowd, to the door.

"There they are," she cried, "there they are."

A pale woman in a dark coat and skirt and a haggard man who might have been taken for a destitute and exhausted tramp, had just come into the lighted hall. They hesitated a moment in the glare, and those who were seated near by had an opportunity, of seeing their faces, and they were startled by what they saw. Supreme happiness, shining there unconscious and unashamed, on a woman's white face, and on the worn and furrowed visage of a ragged giant, the timid trustfulness of a child — it made them stare. They saw too Lady Sidlington in black velvet and pearls run to these strange people, cling to a hand of each, kiss the woman, and then too the man, and go with them to the lift holding tight to both of them and come away, with tears swimming in her eyes.

"He looked like a man come back from the grave," said one.

"But did you see his face?" asked another.

"And hers?"

"He is a returned prisoner of war," said someone, "and that is his wife." The whisper travelled through the hall from one table to another.

Jocelyn de St. Christe had watched Lady Sidlington run to the door. He had seen what the others had seen. He was standing alone, as she came back, but she did not notice his pale curiously intent stare, for her eyes were dimmed, she saw nothing, and no one, but she found her way to the side of the nicest man in the world.

"Peggy," he whispered.

"Yes dear —"

"Are they happy?"

"You should have seen their faces."

She turned to face him, her eyes brimming, and smiled, and, there was something for him in that smile, and something new in her face, that had never been there before.

Upstairs in the little hotel sitting room Helen knelt on the floor beside her husband's chair. He sat motionless, his head thrown back, his eyes half closed, his head touching her hair. His immense frame was shrunken in its torn and shabby khaki clothing, his face streaked with deep lines, his eyes sunken. He spoke slowly:

"Forgive me Helen, if I seem queer — I am so very tired. When they released me the other day

and told me to find my way back, I was afraid. I was almost sorry to leave the camp. It is difficult to come back to life again. I had left friends there — pals who will never come home now. I have been ill myself — typhoid. You have written that you were waiting for me — but I wasn't sure. It was difficult to distinguish between dreams and reality — I had had so many delusions. How could I know you were really alive? I had believed for so long that you were dead. Then Jimmy told me that I was mistaken, but when I went to find you in that Hospital you were gone. That was long, long ago. Once I had lived for you, only for you. Then I had ceased to live. Living meant nothing. Death was far more real. What is living?

"In the camp, we had enough food. Packages came for me, supposedly from you. I always had enough tobacco for my pipe. The Germans swore at us. That was not living. Washing out the hut —emptying slops — making boots — I was an efficient cobbler — Perhaps I'd better go on earning my living as a cobbler — Maybe that is all I am good for now — I can't remember what I used to do before the war. Before the war. What a rum idea as if there ever had been a war.

"I took the road with half a dozen others, they turned us loose like beasts, thought we could smell our way home. We didn't know where to go — and we were out of training. I pulled my cap over my eyes so as not to see too much. It worried me

you know to be free in such a big place. The men were worried too. They kept saying:

"'Which way, Bill?' 'You lead, Bill.' 'How far is it — Will there be a train?'

"I didn't feel happy — just depressed and guilty, as if I were being pursued. I kept saying to myself —'Helen is waiting, Helen is waiting,' with my eyes fixed on the mud of the road, but I didn't really believe, I couldn't believe, I didn't know how, I couldn't imagine what it would be like seeing you again — you had been for so long the light of my eyes — and now I couldn't remember your face — not really remember. I didn't seem to *know* anything about you, not as I know other things — I knew all about the war — I knew for instance all the different sounds of shells, of all kinds and calibres, and all the sounds of pain, the shouts and the screams and the cries and the curses and whinings — I knew about rats and vermin and flooded trenches and I knew all the odours and aspects of disease — I knew men, stripped of every pretence and every protecting bluff, stark, solid, quailing stoic men. I knew just exactly their capacity for suffering, the extent of their power of enduring fatigue and the tenacity of their hold on life. I knew a hundred ways of dying and as many of killing, and what it was to be hungry, to the point of being sick at the sight of food. And I knew that a man could give his life for a friend, and his last piece of bread to a whining pal — but I knew nothing about women — And I did not know about you

Helen — I remember that I had spent years of time absorbed in looking at you, but strain my inward gaze as I might, I could not see you now — And I was afraid to see you — afraid I would not recognize you.

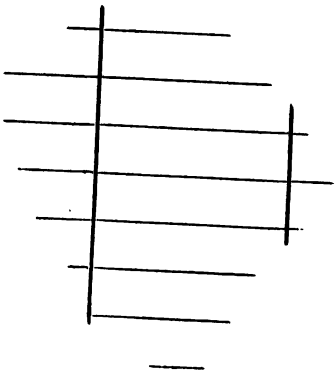
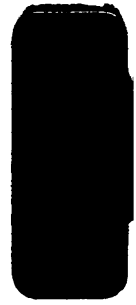
"Thank God I did. It was the strangest thing. You were so different, so different, but you were different in a way that I understood — when I saw you there in the railway station, my heart gave a leap, your white face so wonderful — it had changed as I remember now, imagining that it would change, and as I looked at you — I knew because of the war you had changed, that you were mine.

"Jimmy found me just in time — another year like those two first years of the war and I would not have been fit to come back to you — now — I don't know — you and I are not the same — but we'll find a way — Jimmy said you wanted me to live and that I suppose is the reason I did live — some didn't. Some went crazy. Many died. There was typhus in the camp. Some died of heart break, it was too long. They hadn't enough hope to last out to the end.

"We'll go back to the country shall we? And sit awhile very quiet in the garden, and after a time, the war will seem just a bad dream.

"You know, the strangest thing is going to happen. No one is going to want to remember this war — and no one will ever know what men did, out there, and no one will care, and they are going to say it was all for nothing, and no one will ever under-

stand, because those of us who know won't be able to tell.

"But I will be able to care for you — I believe I will be able to care for you better than I ever did before — you see the war has been a wonderful thing for individual man — up against it — all alone — all alone. The men that died and the men that lived discovered things out there — but they can't tell. The dead are dumb and will be forgotten — and the living if they tried to tell would be thought only tiresome bores — but all the same — it's true — I'm tired now — but you will see — Helen — you will see —"

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